

JUNE, 1961

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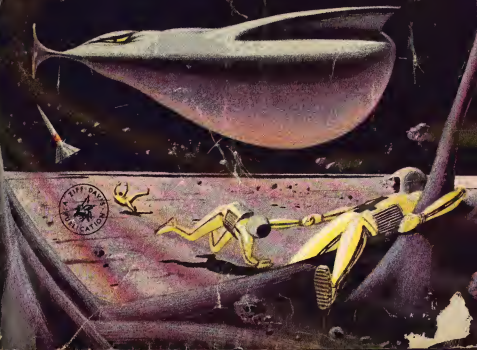
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Fact and Science Fiction Stories

JUNE, 1961

Vol. 35, No. 6

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EDITORIAL

YOU will have noticed that this issue marks the beginning of a new feature—one that we think will be welcomed by all readers. (We aren't so sure about writers.) This is the series of profiles of currently famous science fiction authors. Some time ago a similar series of biographies, concentrating on famous masters of sf of the past, appeared in our sister magazine, *Fantastic*. Reader reaction was overwhelmingly approving—but letter after letter said, in effect: "Why don't you tell us about the lives and ideas of the boys who are writing now?"

So we asked sf historian Sam Moskowitz to get cracking on the new project. The first of his reports-in-depth appears on Page 67—a good, hard look at the accomplishments of Robert Heinlein, and at the controversy that surrounds some of his philoso-

phy. In a future issue you will be reading about A. E. Van Vogt, and, later on, many of the other giants.

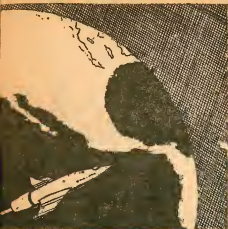
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WE'D like to express our personal and corporate thanks and appreciation to the officers and members of the Eastern Science Fiction Association, which recently honored *Amazing* on the occasion of its 35th anniversary. With pardonable pride we quote the wording on the plaque presented to us: "To *Amazing Stories*. The World's First Science Fiction Magazine, on its 35th anniversary, whose drive for leadership under inspired editorial direction has rekindled the enthusiasm and imagination of the science fiction world."

We are deeply grateful for those kind words. We hope to be able to continue to deserve them.

NL





Illustrated by BERNKLAU

WEAPON

By J. F. BONE

The Dauntless was one of the most powerful ships in the Confederation space navy. Yet, in the showdown with the Eglani, victory was not necessarily to the mighty.

BRIGHT CHATTER flowed around her, filling the clean conditioned air of the room with inconsequential noise that hid the tension in a froth of words. It was what wasn't being said that was important, Ellen Fiske thought as she listened to the high pitched voices. Of course, one never paraded feelings. It was indecent,—something like undressing in public. But this matter of keeping a stiff upper lip could be carried to extremes. You went to these get-togethers, played cards and talked about dresses and children and grocery bills just as though there was no war, as though the Eglani never existed, as though the men in the Navy would come back as regularly and predictably as they did

from commercial runs in the old days. But try as you did, you couldn't keep the undercurrents hidden. Fear clung to the sharp shards of sound. There was longing, grief, resignation, and hope, all mixed with a firm unreasoning conviction that if one buried her feelings deep enough everything would solve itself and wind up with a happy ending.

Her hands tightened convulsively and cards squirted from her fingers to the floor as the high-pitched keening shriek of a spaceship's jets came to her ears. The talk stopped suddenly as every woman in the room paused to listen and every eye turned involuntarily toward the ceiling. A big one was coming in. The entire house shivered, quivering in

resonant sympathy to the throbbing pulse of the spaceship's drives. The sound swelled to a crescendo—to stop abruptly with a sharp finality that left an aching silence in its wake.

"I'm sorry, Anne," Ellen said as she bent to retrieve the cards scattered on the floor. "For a moment I couldn't help thinking that—" she stopped and blushed.

"Don't apologize," Anne Albertsen said. "I know how you feel. Fact is I've felt that way myself—more than once." Her eyes were gray and wise in the frame of her pointed elfin face.

Ellen felt a rush of gratitude. Anne was understanding beyond her years, little Anne with her piercing giggle and gay smile. Anne with a husband already a week overdue. She didn't allow herself the luxury of worry, Ellen thought enviously, but then she had been married nearly four years now. She was a veteran of a thousand nights of waiting, not a bride of four months who had only seen her husband twice since that utterly mad and beautiful honeymoon, that precious two weeks torn from a reluctant Navy.

It wasn't easy to be a Navy wife, to listen to the shriek of jetblasts that lowered ships to earth or sent them hurtling outward into the void. It wasn't easy to constantly wonder with each

incoming craft "*Is it his ship? Has he come home safely once more?*" Or as the weeks passed to feel the question turn to a prayer "*Please God, make this one his,—make it his!*" This one wasn't Alton's ship. It couldn't be. He wasn't due back from patrol for another week, and until that week had passed she needn't worry. Her reaction was just the involuntary twitch of overwrought nerves.

The talk began again,—the bright chatter that tried so hard to hide the constant unvoiced prayer "*Please,—oh please God—let this war end. Make this senseless killing stop. Turn the Eglani back to where they came from and let us go back to the ways of peace we know and love.*" The prayer, Ellen thought bitterly, didn't have a ghost of a chance of being answered. God apparently was on the side of the biggest fleet and the best battle discipline, and neither of these was the property of the Confederation.

For centuries men had travelled the starlanes unopposed. Intelligent races were seldom encountered, and those that were were always on a lower technological level than the outward-sweeping hordes of Earth. They could be safely ignored and their worlds bypassed. There were plenty of others without intelligent life.

Colonies were planted. Civilizations were built. Wealth was produced, traded, and exploited. And in time a loosely organized Confederation was established, —a glorified Board of Trade that advised rather than governed. And as system after system passed by default into mankind's hands, the idea grew that the galaxy was man's oyster and the Creator had graciously provided him with a knife.

At that, there was some justice in the thought. An expanding civilization meeting no obstacles for centuries is unlikely to believe the minority of Cassandras. So when the expanding front of humanity collided with that of the Eglani, the first reaction was disbelief, the second panic,—and the third grim anger.

But anger was not enough. Mankind was trying desperately, but a thousand years of peaceful expansion were poor experience to pit against an organized race of warlike conquerors. -

The war wasn't going too well. Even the communiques had stopped calling the shrinking sphere of human power "strategic withdrawals" and "tactical regroupments." Nowadays they either didn't mention the loss of another world, or published the new frontier line without comment. Long ago the dent in mankind's expanding perimeter had become a bulge, and the bulge a

dome that cut inexorably into the worlds of the Confederation. Slowly man's domination of this sector of the galaxy was being blotted out. In slightly more than five years a hundred Confederation worlds had fallen into the hands of the Eglani as the Confederation evacuated and withdrew, bartering precious space and lives for infinitely more precious time to forge the weapons and battle skills to crush the aliens.

Ellen knew all this, but it didn't seem important. What mattered was that her man was out there on the frontier fighting the Eglani. She wanted him home with all the blind possessive selfishness of her sex. She wanted to feel his arms around her and later in the quiet of their home to tell him what he had a right to know. She laid down her cards and ran her hands over her abdomen with a curious half protective half possessive gesture, a wry smile touching her lips. She was doing her part just as Alton was doing his. Life was needed. Life had to be replaced.

Another keening shriek from the sky. Another ship was in.

And Ellen was standing up. Her face was glory.

"It's Alton!" she said with odd softness. "I'd know the sound of those drives anywhere in the galaxy." And then—quietly—she fainted . . .

Within minutes after landing, interrogation teams from Central Intelligence swarmed over ship and crew like vultures on a dead carcass. For hours the questioning and examination went on and not until the last tape, the last instrument, and the last crewman of the "Dauntless" had been wrung dry of information did the torture stop. Literally nothing was overlooked but the results as usual were negative—three strikes, three kills, two boardings, and nothing to show for them but Eglan corpses. As usual the aliens were thorough. They fought while they could and died when they could fight no more, and headless bodies were no use to Central Research. Reluctantly, Intelligence released the officers and crew.

The Eglan Enigma was no closer to solution than it was five years ago when the aliens had blasted a Confederation exploration ship and had started the war. But Commander Alton Fiske wasn't worried about that. Ellen was out there waiting for him and he'd been delayed too long already

A WEEK is never long at best, —and this had been shorter than most, Fiske decided as he picked up a ground car at fleet headquarters and directed the driver to take him to his quarters. It was a little better than an

hour until blastoff, which would give him time enough to pick up his kit and say goodbye, to Ellen for the fourth time. He'd been lucky. The "Dauntless" needed modification and repair and the week planetside was his longest time ashore since his honeymoon. Of course, Ellen wasn't going to like his sudden departure, but she was a Navy wife and she knew what she was getting into before they were married. It was an abiding wonder that she had married him in the face of his Cassandra prophecies of trouble and heartache. But then—Ellen was an unusual woman.

As he left the forbidding grimness of Fleet Headquarters he almost smiled. In a way it was a relief to get away from the long-faced brass whose professionally preoccupied air was merely a camouflage for the worry that ate at the linings of their stomachs. Fiske was glad that he wasn't one of the Ulcer Echelon, that his worries involved relatively simple things such as fighting a ship and getting home alive.

As it was, the pain of leaving again was bad enough, and if it weren't for Ellen's "get togethers" it would be greater. They were the one fault in her otherwise perfect character. How a perfectly sane and sensible woman could endure those gabfests where every blessed female was talking at the same time was

more than he could understand. But Ellen not only took them in her stride, she took them three or four times a week.

His face clouded as he saw the squadron of ground cars parked before his quarters. Their significance was obvious. Of course, she didn't expect him home this early in the day, and if she'd known of the orders he'd received there probably would have been no one here but her. Still, he'd have to go inside and face that crowd of cats mewling at each other over some conversational bone. He sighed as he stepped out of the car, told the driver to wait, and walked the few steps to his quarters.

Through the clatter of shrill voices the squealing giggle of Anne Albertson cut like a knife, piercing his ears as he stood in the tiny entrance hall, reluctant to enter farther yet unwilling to leave. He winced. Sure, Anne probably had a right to squeal. Her husband had landed his riddled ship yesterday morning and had walked away from the wreckage. Sure—she had a right to squeal, but did she have to do it in his house?

Fixing his expression into a noncommittal mask, he stepped into the living room, and with his appearance the noise stopped. Twelve pair of eyes looked at him and Anne Albertson said into the silence "I think we'd better leave,

girls. We're not needed here right now." There was a murmur and a rustle, and miraculously the room was empty, except for Ellen. She stood in front of him, a slim straight girl with a face that was oddly white against the wealth of her blue-black hair. She wasn't pretty, Fiske thought. She was beautiful.

"Are you off again?" Ellen asked.

Fiske nodded. Wives, he suspected, were telepathic.

"Admiral Koenig should go drown himself," she said bitterly. "He has no right to send you off like this. You've been home only six days."

"That's twice as long as last time," Fiske pointed out reasonably. He felt proud of her. She was pure steel all the way through. No tears, no fuss, even a faint smile on her lips. If possible he loved her more than ever. "If you don't like it," he continued with a wry grin, "You might take it up with the Admiral."

"Not me," Ellen said. "The one time I saw him at close range he scared me half to death."

"Oh well, you needn't worry. It's just aother try for prisoners. The Research Institute wants a live Eglan."

"Haven't they got some? Ed Albertson came in with a few last trip."

"Those were civilians. The labs want a military man or two.

There's a lot of differences between the *Egla*n military and civilians that don't make sense."

"All they'd need to do is look at our fighting men. There's a lot of differences between *them* and civilians that don't make sense."

Fiske grinned. "Anyway, it's a milk run this time," he lied.

"Don't kid the troops on the home front," she said. "It's big, mean, and dirty."

"It's no worse than any other mission. Sure, they're all bad but I'm on detached assignment and there won't be a lot of other ships around cluttering up space and drawing attention."

"I wish they'd leave us alone."

"So do I. But those mule-eared *Egla*n militarists aren't going to be satisfied until we pin their ears back."

"I suppose so, but I don't like to think of you out there."

"Someone has to go," he said quietly, "and besides I've always managed to come back. I'm getting pretty good at it now." He kissed her lightly on the end of her nose.

"Just keep on being good," she said. "I like having you around." She kissed him then, a fierce hungry kiss that left him breathless. "All right sailor, there's something for you to come home to. Now let's get your gear together."

Ellen followed him to the door.

"I'm not going down to the field with you this time," she said. "Last time was enough. I don't think I could stand watching you disappear outside again. But I made something to take with you." She picked up a square flat package from the top of the recorder and thrust it into his hands.

"Another tape like the last one?" he queried.

"Not exactly like the last one," she smiled, "but it's along the same lines. You said you liked the other."

"I did. It was nice to hear your voice. And would you believe I never grew tired of hearing it? It gets lonely out there."

"It gets lonely here too. Now, off with you or I'll be tempted to kidnap you for the duration." She kissed him, a cool wifely kiss that was tender but passionless, pushed him gently away, and stood beside the door until his car disappeared around the corner on its way back to the Base.

She sighed and turned back to the house. That was all it was now—just a house—but for the past week it had been a home. She wondered when, if ever, it would be a home again. It was starting already—the worry, the hidden fear, the agony of suspenseful waiting.

She jumped as the doorbell rang and Anne Albertson's face appeared in the viewplate.

"I came back," Anne said as she entered the room. "I thought you might need me, and besides—I forgot something." She looked at the recorder with an odd expression on her pointed face. "Well," she said finally, "I didn't think anyone wanted it worse than I did. I thought it might amuse Ed. He's pretty low. He lost a lot of men."

"Wanted what?" Ellen asked curiously.

"That recording I made of the first part of our get together. I left it lying on top of the recorder, but it isn't there now."

Ellen gasped and put the back of her hand to her mouth. "Oh no!" she said in a strangled voice.

Anne looked at her curiously.

"I gave it to Alton," Ellen said. "I thought it was the one I made for him."

"Oh well, he shouldn't mind. Your voice is on it too."

"You don't know Alton," Ellen said miserably. . . .

AS the "Dauntless" bored through Cth space in the middle blue component, Fiske reviewed his last meeting with Admiral Koenig. It hadn't been too satisfactory. Central Research, it seemed, still wanted a live Eglan trooper. It didn't matter that the Navy hadn't captured one in five years of trying. The requirement still stood. It took no great intel-

ligence to understand why Central wanted a prisoner. A great deal about the aliens could be understood if there was live meat available. The only trouble was that there never had been, and probably never would be a live Eglan prisoner of war. Fiske automatically excluded the Eglan civilians. They were essentially no different than a civilized human.

It puzzled Fiske. How a people who were gentle, civilized, and understanding could produce a warrior caste so fiercely dedicated and so utterly different was a mystery he couldn't solve. Sure—some of it probably was connected with the suicide devices surgically implanted in their skulls, but that wasn't all of it. Their fanatic will to fight, their utter disregard of death and their incredible discipline had no reflection in their civilian counterparts. The Eglan soldiery were a living denial of the human axiom that a society left its impression upon all of its components. Certainly there was no reflection of the Eglan civilian in the Eglan soldier,—or vice versa.

Fiske shrugged. After all, it wasn't his problem outside of the fact that he had to fight them. And it had been proven some time ago that ship for ship humanity was fully a match for the aliens. It was only when groups

were involved that the Eglan superiority was apparent. And then it was overwhelming.

There was some trick of discipline or communication that welded a group of Eglan fighting ships into a single cohesive unit that was thus far unbeatable. Humanity had to learn—or it was lost—and would go the way of the other civilizations that had been in the path of alien conquest.

Fiske shrugged. Given time, men might learn the answer. But time was getting short. Koenig felt that if the answer wasn't found soon, humanity would pass the point of no return. Already the inner worlds were glutted with refugees. Industry was trying vainly to gain upon the tremendous attrition in ships and weapons and still supply the population. Financial structures were tottering on the brink of ruin. Taxation was oppressive, restrictions were galling and unpleasant, and everywhere disaffection with the progress of the war was rampant.

"If the armchair admirals had their way," Koenig had said bitterly "we'd be through now. But we can't hold out much longer. This delaying policy is going to split wide open. We're going to be forced to mount a counter offensive against an enemy we know can outmaneuver and outfight us in large formations,—

an enemy who knows a great deal about us, but about whom we know nothing. We simply have to get a line on how they operate."

So here he was again, chasing the will-o-the-wisp of an Eglan prisoner. He sighed, shrugged and turned his attention to the banks of instruments that recorded every vital function of the ship.

This part of the voyage was easy. Not even the inhumanly efficient Eglani could guard all parts of the fluid hemisphere they had pushed into the territory of the Confederation, and ships travelled with relative ease across the ill defined border that separated the two warring races.

But life aboard ship was neither easy nor relaxed. Under Fiske's command, it was a constant striving for perfection. Five years of battle experience had taught him that neither officers nor crew could become too familiar with the offensive and defensive armaments of a ship. Constant practice was the only answer to Eglan coordination and every man aboard knew that the more proficient they became the better were their chances of coming home alive. So all hands spent every spare moment refining skills of war, solving simulated tactical problems, trying to increase response speed and improve combat efficiency.

Fiske checked the control console, his eyes sweeping across the lights and dials that indicated the "Dauntless" was manned and ready and that the crew were at their proper stations. Satisfied that everything was in order, he set up a tactical problem on the board and buzzed for the Executive officer.

"Take over, Oley," he said, as the Exec slid into the chair beside him.

"Hmm, a stinker you leave me," Olaf Pedersen remarked as his eyes scanned the board.

"I'll be in quarters if you need help," Fiske said. He pushed off in a flat dive toward the hatch that led to his quarters as Pedersen took up the prolegmen and the drill went on. As ship commander he enjoyed the priceless luxury of privacy, and for the little time that remained before breakout, he would luxuriate in solitude and listen to what Ellen taped for him. It was a pleasure he had carefully saved for this moment before they went into action. He hoped that it was something gay and inspiring, perhaps with a little of the affection they had for each other—but whatever it was it would be Ellen's voice and for awhile it would give him the illusion that she was near.

He webbed into his shock-couch, threaded the spool of tape into the playback and flipped

the switch. For a few seconds the tape hummed quietly through the guides. Then a blast of noise erupted from the speaker.

Anne Albertson's piercing giggle.

Laughter.

Voices—piercing female voices pitched at their most irritating level—a cacophonous clatter through which snatches of treble phrases sliced with nerve jangling shrillness!

Fiske's howl could be heard through the entire forward part of the ship!

He reached out angrily to turn off the playback, but even as he did, he hesitated. Ellen must have given him this tape for a reason,—and it was obvious that he was missing it. She wasn't the sort to play practical jokes. Gritting his teeth he forced himself to listen to the gabble that rasped his ears and frayed his temper. It was the quintessence of irritation, a garbled, calm-destroying jangle that had all the comfort of a dental drill grinding out an infected molar.

And then he heard it. The background noise died a little, and across the disconnected chatter came Ellen's voice—clear crisp and light—mouthing the same banalities as the others! It was wrong. Everything about it was wrong. And then he understood.

For behind her voice a pattern

emerged, a pattern that was neither light, nor gay, nor superficial. It was a desperate clinging to the familiar little things that made up normal life, a deliberate avoidance of the war, the fear and the worry. And Fiske realized with an odd feeling of surprise that here was a counterpart of the wardroom gabfests aboard ship. The attitude was the same. There was no essential difference. He stood it until her voice faded into the background and then he turned off the playback. Ellen should have known that he understood how she felt. There was no need for this. He felt oddly cheated as he put the tape away in his locker and returned to the control room.

The "Dauntless" broke out of hyperspace travelling just under Lume One, well within Eglan territory. Fiske knew from experience that the enemy detectors were efficient and it was always risky to breakout into normal space—but he had to come out to get a fix on potential targets.

"Set!" the gunnery officer said.

Instantly the "Dauntless" slammed back into fourspace. The scan had taken barely ten seconds, and with reasonable luck the dip into normal space would remain unnoticed long enough to give them the advantage of surprise. At best such an advantage would be fleeting. At worst he would breakout in the

middle of an Eglan trap. Actuality would probably be somewhere in between. He'd have perhaps twenty minutes—and in that time he'd have to accomplish his mission and get the "Dauntless" back into the relative safety of fourspace.

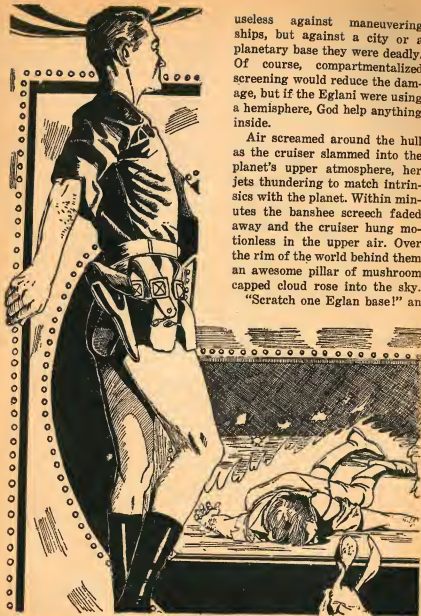
The world ahead was a small planet about two thirds the size of Earth, and from it came the persistent radiation of nuclear stockpiles and atomic machinery. There was a base here—a big one supported by a massive industrial complex. The Eglani had the habit of concentrating their works, which made for greater efficiency of operation, but also made them far more remunerative targets.

THERE was no waiting. The cruiser flashed into normal spacetime, a bank of red lights blossomed on the control board, and the gunnery officer launched a salvo of torpedoes at the Eglan Base. The torps were new. Each carried a tiny hyperspace converter that pushed them up into the lower orange. They would arrive on target milliseconds after they were launched, breakout into normal space, and detonate. They were tricky things that required nearly ten seconds data to adjust, but when properly set they could materialize within any fixed screen. The inherent qualities of fourspace made them

useless against maneuvering ships, but against a city or a planetary base they were deadly. Of course, compartmentalized screening would reduce the damage, but if the Eglani were using a hemisphere, God help anything inside.

Air screamed around the hull as the cruiser slammed into the planet's upper atmosphere, her jets thundering to match intrinsics with the planet. Within minutes the banshee screech faded away and the cruiser hung motionless in the upper air. Over the rim of the world behind them an awesome pillar of mushroom capped cloud rose into the sky.

"Scratch one Eglan base!" an



anonymous voice in Fire Control yelped joyfully.

"Stow that. Silence down there." Fiske barked.

"Airboat at 0025," a spotter announced, "hedgehopping."

"Forward batteries ready."

"Use a force rod," Fiske ordered. "I want that ship intact."

The pale lance of a paramagnetic beam clawed through the atmosphere and struck the airboat. Driven by the awesome power of the cruiser's generators it struck, clung, and wrenched the airship from its slow path through the sky. Instantly all jamming devices in the cruiser flicked on, ripping the air with a blast of interference that filled all the nearer reaches of space.

"Quarter drive, vertical," Fiske ordered, and the cruiser leaped upward, dragging the airboat behind it into the airless outer regions where the beam could operate more effectively.

"Okay, boys, pull her in," the bored voice of the gunner's mate in the forward blister came over the intercom, and a moment later the fragile shell of the airboat thudded against the armored hull of the cruiser.

"Boarders away!" Fiske ordered.

The boarding party, specifically trained for this operation, opened the airlocks, carved the side off the airboat, and dove into the crowded interior.

The Eglani, caught without spacesuits, smashed to the floor of their craft by uncompensated acceleration, their air lost in a mighty rush, still tried to resist. Space is not immediately lethal, and by holding their breath several managed to fire a few hand-blasts at the incoming boarders. But it was useless. The beams clawed futilely at the heavy armor and the return fire carved a smoking path through the packed bodies. Then the living died to join the already mutilated dead as tiny explosions limned their heads with momentary brightness.

Fiske sighed at the familiar carnage visible in the viewscreen. Another abortion. But he had expected it. No one yet had caught a living Eglan soldier and he didn't think that he'd be the first to do so.

Young Lieutenant Fitzhugh commanding the party stepped up to the signalman's scanner and reported. "They're all dead, sir. We have no casualties."

"All right, disengage and return." Fiske said as the signalman scanned the piled headless heap of short-legged, long-bodied aliens. One still had a face. The wide mouth, prehensile proboscis and mule ears were still intact, but the back was gone from its head. The face had a masklike quality as it glared up at him with bulging eyes half

driven from their cavernous sockets.

"Aye, sir." Lieutenant Fitzhugh turned away from the scanner, and one by one the men came back along the boarding line to the cruiser's airlock. The scannor flicked off as the signalman made his way back.

"Enemy on starboard beam," the talker's voice was lost in a clangor of alarms and a thudding concussion as the entire starboard battery erupted one simultaneous blast of destruction at the Eglan cruiser which had suddenly emerged a scant five miles away.

The Eglan was quick, inhumanly quick in his reaction. He had broken out much too close, but even so his primary screens flared an instant before the broadside struck. But no primary screen ever built could stand alone against the megatons of energy that instantaneously erupted against it. Screen and ship disappeared in the hellish blast, reduced instantly to glowing radioactive gas. The enormous fireball licked hungrily toward the "Dauntless" as the automatic controls promptly took her back into hyperspace.

Lieutenant Fitzhugh, still ten feet from the open airlock saw the flare of the explosion and the premonitory shudder of the ship. He knew that he didn't have time

enough to make it. With the strength of desperation he threw the object he carried toward the rapidly closing airlock as the ship vanished from sight and the searing fireball enveloped his body. He never had time to decide whether his aim had been true or not . . .

Fiske looked at the Eglan head Lockman Vornov was holding up to his viewplate. The man was talking. "—He was still outside when we hypered, sir, but he threw this in through the airlock. It hit me on the leg, sir."

For the first time Fiske really understood the term "mixed emotion." He was feeling it now. Regret at Fitzhugh's death was exactly balanced by the wild hope that the impossible might have happened—that the head was that of an Eglan soldier rather than a civilian. Certainly Fitzhugh wouldn't have brought it back unless he had good reason to suspect that it might be useful—nor would he have tried so desperately to get it aboard ship.

"Get that thing down to Doc Bonner," he ordered, "and tell him that I'll be along in a minute." . . .

Old Doc Bonner who derived his nickname from combat rather than chronological age looked inquiringly at Fiske. "Should I post it or pickle it?" he asked.

"Post it. It might blow up be-

fore we reach home. Get to work."

"It's a point," Bonner admitted, "but it might not be too valid with Headquarters. Since it hasn't exploded by now it probably won't."

Fiske shook his head. "There's no sense in taking chances. Besides it might belong to a civilian."

"Not this baby," Bonner said. "It's military." He indicated a white line at the base of the skull. "That's where they blow up" he said. "There's a charge implanted there. And besides, it's as you say, sir, we shouldn't take chances." Bonner laid out a row of shining instruments, turned on the visual recorder over the table and went to work.

"Hmm—must have been quite a bit of dissection here," he commented as he inspected the back of the head. "Poor job of suturing and lots of fibrous connective tissue, but it's healed well enough. He cut in delicately with a scalpel. "Oh-oh! Paydirt! Now wait a minute—let's find out where these leads go—hmm,—that'd be the spinal accessory nerve if this head were human, but with this fellow it might be anything." He swung an auto-camera into place and took a series of still pictures, probed the skull for a moment with a pair of long-jawed forceps and lifted out a tiny translucent capsule with a fused dark globule dan-

gling below it. "Ah—here we are." He placed the capsule carefully in a cotton lined pan. "You'd better get that thing down to engineering," he said. "That's not my line. I'll finish this post while you're gone. I might find something of interest to report in the Medical Journal. Incidentally, that capsule was linked to the nerve over a micro-pore graft. I'm keeping that part for microdissection. It wouldn't do you any good."

Fiske took the pan and left the surgery. Doc was right. This was the part that was his baby, not that ball of meat in there on the tray . . .

CHIEF Engineer Sandoval took the pan gingerly. Setting it on a bench he peered at it thoughtfully. "Hmm, a sealed unit," he said. "We'll X-ray it first and maybe then we can do something about it."

"Better disconnect that detonator, or the damn thing may blow your head off," Fiske advised.

"Don't try to tell me my business, skipper," Sandoval grinned. "I was doing this when you were in knee pants. You go back and run the ship and me and my boys'll find out what makes this tick."

Fiske grinned with mild embarrassment. "Okay, Sandy, I'm off to the ivory tower. Pass the

word when you find what cooks."

"Sure thing." . . .

Bonner reported nothing new on the brain. "It'll make a nice paper," he said, "but that's all. In fact I'd surmise that our own are a trifle more complex than theirs if convolutions have anything to do with mental power. The Eglan brain is rather simple in some aspects. But of course it's the relative weights of brain and cord that really count."

"You're way over my head," Fiske said.

"Incidentally, what did engineering find out about that gadget?"

"No report as yet. I'll let you know if anything develops." Fiske cut Doc off the intercom as Chief Sandoval came in.

Fiske looked at his grim face curiously. "What's the trouble?"

"Nothing,—that's the hell of it. I've been kicking myself for not figuring it out before. That gadget's nothing but a fined-up subetheric communicator. We used them before the Lorcom was developed. There's an explosive charge, but the arming mechanism was burned off. And that's it."

"Not quite," Fiske said. "There was a direct neural connection. And that's why they fight as a unit. A ship's commander would have complete charge of his ship like a brain

with a hundred bodies—and he's probably hooked up with a squadron C.O. And the squadron C.O.—what a system!" Fiske cut off and twisted the selector.

"Communications!" he said.

"Aye sir."

"Contact Chief Engineer Sandoval, tape his data and send it to Prime."

"Sorry sir—can't be done!"

"What!"

"Yes sir—there's an interference blanket in Cth that you can't drive anything through. I've been trying to raise Base for an hour."

"When did this come on?"—
"Why wasn't I informed?"

"It came on about an hour ago, and you were busy. We've never had anything like this before, sir. I thought I'd try to punch a beam through it before I quit."

"All right—break out the message torps—tape the data and send them off."

"But—"

"That's all, Lieutenant—get cracking."

"Aye sir."

"Well—that's a new wrinkle" Fiske observed. "They've figured out our Lorcom—and we're jammed."

Pederson looked up from the control board "Hmm—doesn't smell so good. They wouldn't jam us unless they had something else up their sleeves. They're fig-

uring on stopping us, no doubt."

Fiske nodded. "I thought of that—but how?"

"Damned if I know—but they've got some idea."

"Well two can play at this jamming game—and we'll deal with the other thing when it comes." Fiske dialed Sandoval "Sandy"—he said as the engineer's face appeared on the screen. "Can your boys build an all wave subetheric broadcaster?"

"Yes and no," Sandoval said. "We can build one—but we're not able to. No components."

"How about modifying the Lorcom?"

"That wouldn't be too tough. But you can't be thinking of—"

"How long would it take?"

"Twenty hours minimum. You realize, of course, that it's going to deprive us of long range communications."

"All right, so we lose them. They're worthless anyway. We're being jammed. Now get going on that conversion, and cut all the time you can."

"Aye sir."

Sandoval's boys must have sweated blood, Fiske thought, for it was barely twenty two hours before the Chief's heavy voice came over the intercom. "It's finished, sir." Sandoval said. "We're ready to roll."

"Good," Fiske replied. "What's the output?"

"A kilowatt across the board."

"Hmm—not so good.—We're not going to blanket much with that."

"You'll get through all right; but you can't expect any more than that. If you want to jam you'd better concentrate on the 1400 band. You can smother anything in that area."

"No. I'd rather have full coverage. I think the noseys are laying for us, and I want something that'll affect every Eglan in range, not just part of them. If we confuse them enough we can crack straight through before they recover."

"What do you intend to use to cause this confusion?" Sandoval asked.

A grin crossed Fiske's face. "We might put a signalman on the mike and give them the latest box scores in the Tri World league mixed with double talk. Or our linguist could issue phon-ey orders in Eglanese."

Sandoval grinned in answer. "Sneaky, isn't it?—this business of hoisting the engineers on their own petards. Personally, I favor music—some of these squirm combos the boys listen to would drive a saint out of Heaven."

Fiske chuckled. "It's an idea—and not a bad one at that. Angelo Bordoni in the signal section has some progressive squirm recordings that'd make your hair curl. We'll make him a disk

jockey as soon as we have some Eglani to try it on."

"You won't have to wait long, sir," Pedersen said, as he swivelled his chair to face Fiske. "Detectors report a disturbance in C-green about ten hours ahead. Looks like a couple of class one cruisers. Not ours."

"What's their bearing?"

"They're moving along our line slightly under our component."

Fiske leaned back in his chair, a thoughtful expression on his face. He looked at Pedersen and nodded.

"Battle Stations, condition two," Pedersen said to the talker. "Well, there's two of them down there to try your gadget on."

"Gives us one break at least," Fiske said "We're not too outnumbered."

Pedersen shrugged off the pun. "In your shoes, sir," he said, "I'd be tempted to run like hell."

"Sure, so am I. But just where could we get a better chance than this? If we're going to fight we might as well get decent odds."

"You call two to one decent?"

"I'll tell you more when their drive patterns are analyzed. If they're cruisers we can outgun and outrun them,—and if they're battlewagons they'll never catch us. Not even—"

"Objects register as enemy heavy cruisers," the talker said "Drive intensity point oh two over ours."

"Well," Pedersen remarked "You're wrong on one point. We're not going to outrun them."

"Seems that way," Fiske agreed. "They must be new models,—probably ones like those that chewed up Ed Albertson's ship. But they can't be any more heavily armed than we are."

"Maybe not, but there's two of them" Pedersen said drily. "I would imagine this changes things."

"Naturally. We'll run for awhile. I'm not risking my ship against those odds if I can help it." Fiske turned on the command circuit. "One eighty gyro turn," he said "Execute!"

The "Dauntless" swapped ends and virtually without delay began backtracking across the warps of Cth space. Since inertia didn't exist in hyperspace the change in direction was made instantaneously. At maximum blast the "Dauntless" began to put space between her and her pursuers, who at once changed course to overtake the fleeing Confederation ship.

HOUR after hour the three ships drove through the harsh blue monochrome of upper Cth, and slowly the distance between pursuers and pursued less-

sened. Travelling in a great curve that would ultimately take them into Confederation territory Fiske and Pedersen watched the telltale dots in the spotting tank come closer.

"We're not going to make it," Fiske said finally. "They'll catch or pass us before we hit the frontier."

"Nice," Pedersen replied. "With one ahead matching our component and sowing mines, and the other behind and above us just in case we try to drop out. We've got about the same chance as a snowball in hell."

"It's not quite that bad. We have weapons and we've got the broadcaster. They won't be expecting it, and if we drop into normal space looking like we want to fight, I'll bet they'll follow us."

"Sure they will."

"They'll get a surprise then. How'd you like to be wearing one of those cute little communicators and get a blast of Bordoni's progressive squirm the minute you made breakout?"

"I wouldn't."

"I'm betting that they won't either." Fiske turned to the talker—"all hands—Battle Stations! Full armor. Condition one. Bordoni—stand by with your recordings—report when ready." A cold ball bounced in Fiske's stomach as the reports snapped in. Up until now the Confedera-

tion ships had been individually superior to the aliens, an advantage that barely counterbalanced the Eglani's coordination, but these ships were superior to his own in speed at least, and what they might lack in firepower they made up in numbers.

No skipper in his right mind would tackle two to one odds in favor of the aliens. But it was unavoidable now. Fiske shrugged. If he was right about the effect of his broadcaster, he had a chance—but the chance was a slim one anyway you looked at it. Sure—he knew the secret of Eglan coordination, but could he disrupt that coordination? It was a distinct possibility that his attempt at jamming would only be a minor annoyance, and if it was, the secret of the Eglani would die with him.

Of course, there was a possibility that one of the message torpedoes would get through—but torpedoes travelling on a fixed course were usually intercepted and destroyed. At best they were a forlorn hope—sent Earthward more as a gesture than with any expectation of arrival.

And with the Lorcom converted to a subetheric broadcaster he had no exterior communications. The "Dauntless" was on her own—cut off from help—wholly dependent upon the skill of her crew for survival.

"Stand by for breakout," Fiske ordered.—"Execute."

Smoothly the ship swapped ends, halted instantly, and dropped like a stone through the Cth components as Sandoval cut the converters. With scarcely a shudder the "Dauntless" slipped into normal space.

"Full ahead" Fiske ordered and familiar acceleration clutched at the bodies of the crew. With every electronic and visual sense extended, screens glowing on standby, drives flaring a fierce blue against the dark of space the "Dauntless" swept forward toward the frontier far ahead. Her speed was less than a snail's crawl compared to the inconceivable velocities she had been travelling in Cth but in normal spacetime weapons functioned and sub-etheric communicators worked. Here, fighting was an art—refined by years of drill and practice.

"Bearing zero two four—enemy cruiser. Range two thousand-closing" the talker said. Bearing one nine zero—negative. Range fifteen hundred—extending."

"Not too smart," Fiske observed. "That rear ship'll have to hyper to get ahead of us, and by that time we should get a crack at our long eared friends up ahead."

"Bearing zero one eight—

range one thousand—closing. Bearing one nine zero—negative." the talker interrupted.

"Our little follower's gone back into Cth" Pedersen said.

"Gives us three minutes at least, before he can adjust on us."

"Bearing zero one six—range five hundred—closing." the talker said.

"Stand by all stations," Fiske said calmly—"Bearing zero one six steady—range four hundred,—three hundred,—two five zero,—two two zero—two hundred,—one eight zero" the talker's metallic voice was flat in the tense silence of the ship.

"At my command," Fiske said as he poised his finger over a large red button on the control console.

Over the complex network of spotting, ranging, and computing devices electronic orders flowed into the gun, and torpedo stations. Servos hummed as the weapons aligned on their target and gun crews alertly followed the movements of the automatics ready for emergencies or malfunctions.

"Bearing zero one three, range fifty-closing," the talker's unemotional voice continued. Fiske's hand stabbed the button and an instant later the "Dauntless" yawed violently to the blast of fire that erupted from every

weapon capable of bearing on the Eglan.

"Enemy has fired" the talker said. The "Dauntless" slewed violently as the pilot took evasive action.

For a long second the Eglan hung in space her screens blazing. Then she began to turn,—but it was too late. The concentrated fury of the "Dauntless" broadside erupted against her screens in blazing pyrotechnics. The Eglan staggered and spun off at a tangent. A second later the "Dauntless" bucked and jumped as the Eglan's fire crashed home. The secondary screens flared and vanished. The primaries crackled into the violet under the enormous load of dissipating the megatons of energy that flared against them.

"Holy George!—what sort of stuff are those fellows carrying?" Pedersen breathed, "They outgun us too!" A trickle of blood ran from his nose.

"No—we're about even there" Fiske said as another broadside erupted from the "Dauntless" and another load of destruction hurtled towards the Eglan.

"Enemy has fired" the talker said, and the "Dauntless" again turned off to one side. This time the salvo missed by a comfortable margin.

"What's wrong with them?" Pedersen asked as he stared into the tank. "They're not evading."

"Maybe they can't. We hit him near the drives."

"There they go—too slow, way too slow!"

The "Dauntless" salvo struck and for a moment an intolerable flame lighted space, and when it died the Eglan cruiser had vanished.

"Bearing zero four five enemy cruiser—range one hundred—closing," the talker's voice interjected. "Enemy has fired."

The "Dauntless" yawed violently as Fiske stabbed at the Cth switch. The familiar quivering shook them as the ship clawed at the edge of hyperspace—and simultaneously a pile-driver blow struck them astern tearing crewmen from their safety webs and slamming them with bonecrushing force against unyielding plates and bulkheads. The "Dauntless" rang like a giant gong—the sound disappearing slowly with shimmering reverberations that assumed tangible shapes as the harsh red of lower Cth closed around them.

"Skipper!" the ship intercom rattled. "We can't hold her here! Number three converter's dismounted and there's a hole in the engine room big enough to drive a truck through!"

"Enemy cruiser Cth yellow dead ahead—dropping to our component," the talker said.

"Well—we got one of them," Pedersen said. "Might as well take our medicine like good boys. He'll be sowing mines in a minute."

"That Eglan was cold meat," Fiske said. "The broadcast worked!"

"That second ship wasn't. They came in on us like a hawk at a chicken." Pedersen answered.

"They didn't have time to get the full benefit of it."

"You going to give them another chance?"

"We'll have to. We can't stay here. We can't run, and up here the broadcaster doesn't work. So we go down again. With that noise of Bordoni's we should be able to jar their back teeth loose. Which reminds me—I'd better see how he's doing. That broadcaster is pretty near the engine room." He punched the intercom selector. "How's it going, Bordoni?" he asked.

An anguished wail came out of the speaker. I was just changing a platter when we got struck. I sat on them! Even on my Stan Kenton album, and that's a classic! They're busted to hell! All of 'em!"

"Bordoni!" Fiske snapped.

"Sir?"

"Valve it off son. It can't be helped.—Have you any more?"

"No, sir."

"Can you sing or make noise,

or something?" Fiske asked hopefully.

"Negative sir. I've got mike fright—always did have."

Fiske sighed—"Very well—you're relieved. Report to your station."

"Now what?" Pedersen asked.

"We get something else."

"What?—Bordoni had the only squirm aboard. I know. I shook the ship down—there isn't a thing one tenth as—"

"Enemy has matched components" the talker said.

"Down two shades" Fiske ordered. "We can dodge for awhile" he said absently as the ship dropped into a deeper red monochrome "but he'll get us eventually."

"Sir, the engine room broke in. The converters aren't going to take much more of this—we're on twenty percent overload right now!"

"They'll have to take it" Fiske snapped "If we want to stay alive!"

"I'll try to keep 'em going, boss" Sandoval's voice broke in.

"Thanks Sandy." Fiske cut off. "Now about the noise business—"

"Well" Pederson said—"You might try doing it yourself. Seems that I remember you howling like a wounded wolf a few days ago, just before we clobbered that Eglan base. If it's noise you want, why don't you

give out with a few warwhoops. You damn near lifted the lid off this can."

Fiske's eyes widened. "You have something there," he admitted. He flipped the selector to communications "George," he said, "can you rig a continuous tape playback into that broadcaster? Bordoni's aborted,—smashed his records."

"Sure. Give me ten minutes."

"Make it five and send one of your boys up here. I have a package for him." Fiske switched off and turned to Pedersen. "Have someone go to my quarters and get that roll of sound tape out of my locker. It's in the upper left compartment. Give it to George's man when he shows up." He looked at Pedersen's puzzled expression and grinned. "We're not licked yet, Oley."

"Enemy has matched component" the talker said.

"Down two shades—and keep changing our course. Don't follow one line for more than ten seconds. Fiske ordered.

"That gives us about four more drops before we breakout," the pilot's voice said over the speaker. "And we can't dodge too long. He can outmaneuver us, and ride us right out of Cth."

"How long?"

"Maybe five minutes—maybe less."

"Well—get on with it—we

can't stay here"—Fiske looked glumly at the control board. There was nothing he could do at the moment.

"Aye sir." The red monochrome deepened a trifle as the "Dauntless" dropped closer to breakout.

"Damn—they're quick!" Fiske muttered.

"We're not going to be here long at this rate" Pedersen observed.

"We do what we can. Unless we get that broadcast rigged we've got no chance at all." Fiske lapsed into silence.

A minute passed as the "Dauntless" dodged frantically and the Eglan maneuvered for position.

"Enemy has matched component" the talker said. Instantly the "Dauntless" was surrounded by a reddish-black gloom.

"Infra band coming" Pedersen remarked. "Our spotting isn't too good there. He can be on top of us before we know it."

"Let's hope theirs isn't either" Fiske answered absently.

"Enemy has matched component," the talker said.

"Well—that's that," Fiske said with grudging admiration as the ship went dark, and began to buck and shudder in the stress area at the border of Cth and normal space. "He's just about

kicked us out of commission."

A violent shock lifted the cruiser and shook her. Metal screamed and ripped as the ship, struck by a mine at the very edge of Cth, was driven downward through the border into breakout. Flashes and pinwheels of light flamed across Fiske's eyes as the ship spun madly into normal space.

The talker wakened him "Enemy cruiser, range three fifty-steady."

Fiske cursed weakly at the unemotional robot voice. Somewhere amidships a dull explosion shook the ship, and then the whole mass of the cruiser moved sideways as a broadside let loose.

Fiske came to awareness with a jerk. Beside him was Pedersen, his face a bloody mask, calmly operating the control board. A piece of scalp had been stripped neatly from his head and hung down the back of his neck together with the smashed wreckage of his helmet.

"Break off, Pete—I'm back. Get a patch on that scalp and a new helmet. You'll look silly breathing space if they hull us up here."

"I thought you had it, skipper," Pedersen grinned through the blood. "That last jump was pretty rough."

"What's up?"

"I don't know. Our Eglan friend is shooting at us from

long range. He doesn't seem very eager to close. Came in to three fifty and has been matching us ever since. Looks like he's waiting for help."

"We can't let this go on.—What's our situation?"

"Damage control reports we're about eighty percent effective. They're working on the number three converter but it'll be at least an hour before she's ready. We've lost two secondary batteries, but the mains are all right and our screens are keeping out the stuff our playmate's sending over."

"Our drives?"

"Okay—except for the converters like I said."

Fiske looked into the plotting tank. "Full right turn", he ordered. "If he won't close—we will."

"Skipper!" the intercom chattered "We've got that tape in. We're ready to roll down here."

"Well—get going" Fiske snarled. "Do I have to tell you everything?"

"No sir—but we thought—"

"Stop thinking and turn that broadcast on!"

"Yes sir!"

"Eighty five degrees right turn—down five" Fiske said. "Full drive—execute!" He bent over the tank and watched the Eglan. The enemy response was slow. "It's working" Fiske murmured happily.

The blindest observer could see that something was wrong with the alien. His maneuvering was sloppy, his fire confused, sporadic, and inaccurate,—and as the "Dauntless" shells crashed into his secondary screens there were no evasive maneuvers or blazing pyrotechnics of point reinforcement. Fiske grinned ferociously. A few more salvos and that would be the end of him.

A violent blow wrenched the "Dauntless" sideways, and another hurled her forward with a tremendous burst of acceleration. And the drives stopped dead. Under momentum alone the cruiser shot onward.

"We've had it, boss." Sandoval's voice came in like a knell of doom. "Torpedo caught us right on the drive lattice. The drives are shot."

"Enemy cruiser coming up dead astern," the talker said. "Range eighty—closing slowly."

The "Dauntless" lay dead—coasting through space. The faint hiss of escaping air and the clatter of booted feet were the only sounds in the hull. The lights still burned on emergency power—but the drive and the powerplant were gone, and with them the "Dauntless" capability to fight.

Fiske wondered dully what was keeping the ship intact.

Somehow the riddled hulk had failed to explode in the sunburst that usually marked the finish of a fighting ship. The guns were silenced. The last mine and torpedo had been fired. The intercom was a shambles of shorted circuits and dead lines. A hole fully a foot across had been ripped through the right side of the control room giving a free opening onto the blackness of space. One more shell, Fiske thought—and that would be the end of it.

But it never came.

The Eglan ship matched velocity less than a hundred yards away—and a dazed communications officer reported—"Sir—they've opened a channel—they want to surrender!"

Fiske looked at Pedersen.

Pedersen looked at Fiske.

The blank incomprehension on the face of one was precisely matched in the face of the other. This was incredible! The Eglan was still in fighting trim. The "Dauntless" was a wreck. Yet the aliens were offering to surrender—and they never surrendered!

"A trap?" Pedersen asked.

"Why? They've got us. We're helpless and they know it." Fiske turned to the intercom. "Tell them we accept. Tell them to lower their screens and prepare to receive boarders." He turned to Pedersen. "Wonder

how we're fixed for a boarding party? You have any idea?"

Pedersen shook his head.

"I'm going to have a look." Fiske removed his safety harness and rose stiffly from his chair, moving painfully toward the manway that led aft to the main gun batteries and the drives.

He passed shambles. Bodies were everywhere. The sick bay had been destroyed by a direct hit. Guns and torpedo mounts were twisted wreckage garnished with dead. The communications center was miraculously untouched, still operating on emergency power, still broadcasting over the all wave transmitter as the endless tape ran and reran through its guides. A hulking figure was bent over the transmitter, working with torch and welding rod resetting tie-downs broken by concussion. With dull surprise, Fiske recognized Sandoval.

The big man saw him and grinned feebly. It was a miracle that he hadn't been opened up, but his battered armor was intact except for several minor rips covered with patches and sealant. His helmet was dented and the short range communicator at its back was shot away. Fiske shook his head as he approached and laid his helmet against the engineer's.

Sandoval's voice came through

"I've got what's left of my boys working on the drive. Give us an hour and we'll be moving again."

"Call them off, Sandy. There's no need. The Eglan has surrendered."

"They've what?"

"Surrendered. Quit. Given up. We've won!"

"You sure you're not in shock, skipper?"

"Just get your men together. We've got to make up a boarding party out of this mess somehow. We've got to collect the wounded and get them out of this wreck. Since the Eglan's still intact we'll take over his ship."

"But skipper, everybody knows that the Eglan don't—"

"Break it off Sandy, and do as you're told. That's an order."

Shaking his head the big man floated off as Fiske shrugged and turned upward toward the gun-decks, picking his way through torn and splintered metal, collecting survivors and issuing orders similar to those he had given Sandoval. In the next twenty minutes Fiske destroyed forever his carefully built reputation for compassion and humanity. . . .

THEY assembled on the main deck—what was left of them. The whole and the wounded, barely thirty men of a crew that had numbered over a hundred. They gathered in a tight

knot staring into the vision screen that gave a clear view of the alien drawn up alongside. The Eglan ship hung black and massive in space, her seamless sides blank save only for the circle of yellow light that marked an open airlock. No glitter of screens reflected the icy glint of the stars. There was a stillness about the ship that was almost frightening as she edged slowly closer to the battered sides of the "Dauntless."

"Boarders away!" Fiske ordered and the motley group of survivors towing the wounded who still lived, opened the airlock and pushed off across the intervening space that separated the two ships. Fiske waited until the last man disappeared into the circle of light in the Eglan's side before pushing off. He blinked once or twice to clear the traces of moisture from his eyes as he looked around the empty stillness that had been his ship. It wouldn't do at all for his men to suspect that besides being a softy, he was a cry baby to boot. . .

The Eglan had a double airlock, and as he emerged through the second airtight valve, he was met by Olaf Pedersen. Pedersen's helmet was off and there was a peculiar expression on his face.

"Well? What did you find?"

Fiske asked, anxiety in his voice.

"She's all ours. There's no fight left in them." Pedersen said. His voice was oddly strained. "We just moved in and took over. The men are collecting the prisoners now—what's left of them." He pointed down the low wide manway that led into the interior of the ship. "Control room's down there," he said.

"I know." Fiske looked around curiously. The ship was like the other captured jobs he'd seen. Even the two decapitated Eglani on the deck were familiar—and the other enemy dead he passed on the way to the control room were not abnormal. One expected to see them in a captured Eglan ship. It was the living who were strange, tight faced, thick bodied, stiffly erect aliens and their human guards who stood in the cross passageways watching him as he passed. Fiske shivered. He had never in his life seen eyes so hell-haunted as those the Eglani turned on him. The aliens looked like they would shatter at a touch, brittle shells held intact by a force greater than their wills.

"Gives you the creeps, doesn't it?" Pedersen asked in a low voice.

"It's worse than anything I've ever seen," Fiske replied. "These people are on the edge of collapse. This is chaos!"

The feeling of brittle tension

increased as they entered the control room in the center of the ship. A short wide Eglan stood beside the master console. He raised his arm in what was obviously a salute, which Fiske punctiliously returned. A muscle in the Eglan's cheek twitched spasmodically. His fingers were clenched, the knuckles white against his greenish skin.

"I am Sar Lauton, of the Eglan Directorate, commander of this ship," the alien said in fluent Terran.

"And I am Commander Alton Fiske of the Confederation Navy," Fiske replied. "I have transferred my men to this ship since you didn't leave much of mine."

"For that I am sorry," the Eglan said. "You fought well and deserved a better end. However, you still have won. It is finished." The Eglan smiled bitterly. "You see, Commander, we never knew that war could be such *horror*. To many of my crew it was too horrible. You undoubtedly saw some of them on your way here."

Fiske nodded. "Now about the surrender terms—" he began.

"There are no terms," the alien said woodenly. "You have won." His face twitched. "Can't you appreciate what your weapon has done? I am an Eglan. An Eglan never surrenders. Yet I and half my crew have surren-

dered. Don't you appreciate the implications of that? Can't you realize that the Directorate is doomed—that you have won a victory here that is more complete than any we have won in a thousand years of war?"

"But—"

"From birth," the Eglan went on, ignoring the abortive interruption, "we of the warrior caste have been trained to believe that there is no glory other than in battle—that the honor of the Directorate and its supremacy is paramount—that the Directorate must expand to bring the blessings of order to the less favored—that the orders of a superior are to be obeyed unquestioningly—that it is only right that we subordinate ourselves to the greater glory of the Eglan race—that our minds and lives are dedicated to this service—that there is no higher honor, no greater glory than to die for the Eglani." He sounded as though he was reciting a litany that had suddenly become no longer believable.

"But this, I find, is wrong. Such a belief is not life. It is death—extinction first of the soul, then of the mind, and finally of the body. Your weapon struck us here at the core of our belief and through our weakest link—a link we had to keep because, paradoxically, it was also the source of our strength and

unity. Through our neurocommunicators your feelings, emotions, and beliefs waged battle with our own. And yours won because their truth was more basic and more just than our own. And so we were disarmed. We were confused. We could not hold control. And finally we could not kill—not even ourselves!” The muscle in his cheek twitched again.

Fiske drew a deep breath. With sudden understanding he recalled his own feelings when he had heard Ellen on that tape. But there must have been more than Ellen—much more. All those others—and somehow the Eglani had sensed the true meaning behind that nauseous gabble! And the meaning had destroyed them!

Of course, this single action wasn't the end of the war, but it was the beginning of the end. The war would go on, but now it wouldn't be humanity with its back against the wall. The Eglani, too, would know the meaning of defeat. Fiske sighed. Somehow he couldn't help feeling sorry for them. They were *too* understanding!

“Thank you,” Sar Lauton said unexpectedly. “Your sympathy is appreciated.”

Fiske looked at him uncomfortably. “Take him away, Oley,” he said, “and put him with the others. I'm getting this crate

out of here.” Fiske sank into the control chair and scanned the board. There was no problem here. He knew Eglan centralized controls almost as well as his own. One man could operate this ship if necessary although it took many others to fight and service it.

He energized the drives and the ship moved ahead. The view-screens glowed framing star studded space and the battered shape of the “Dauntless” falling slowly astern. The old girl lay quietly, coasting through space, gleaming faintly in the cold light of the distant stars. Slowly she shrank to a toy as the Eglan ship moved away.

It was time, Fiske thought, as he adjusted a vernier dial and pushed a small lever. The faint ion trail of the torpedo shone like a pale swordblade in the darkness vanishing toward the derelict astern. Seconds passed and then a gigantic fireball blotted out the stars, and with its dying the “Dauntless” was gone save for a fiercely radiating haze of molecules that spread rapidly outward through circumambient space. . . .

PEDERSEN came in quietly and took a seat opposite Fiske. “The prisoners are secure, sir, and our men are ready for Cth jump,” he said.

“Good. We'll start familiariza-

tion after we reach cruising component."

"Aye sir."

"The 'Dauntless' is gone. Fiske said absently as he energized the converters and the ship shivered at the border of hyperspace.

"I know. I saw her die."

"She was a good ship."

"The best. She won our war."

"I hated to kill her, Oley."

"I know that too. But you had to do it."

Fiske sighed as he took the ship up through the Cth components. It handled smoothly enough, but not as smoothly as the "Dauntless." The two men sat silently with the control board between them.

Fiske spoke finally. "You know, Oley," he said. "I thought it was a calamity when Bordoni broke his recordings."

Pedersen looked at him soberly. "You might still be right," he said. "We're going to win this

war now. We're going to win it completely. They can't stop us now we know their weakness."

"And that's a calamity?"

"Possibly. After all—what are we going to do when we win? What sort of conquerors will *we* be? How will we treat them and the races they have conquered? We have no precedents. We've bypassed other intelligent races in our sphere. We've left them alone because we didn't know how to handle them, and we knew we didn't know. But we can't leave the Eglani alone. They're going to be our responsibility—and we've never learned to rule."

Fiske stared, shrugged, and grinned. "Could be that the Eglani will win after all—even though we defeat them in battle. They have the administrative experience."

Pedersen chuckled without humor. "You see what I mean? It still may be a calamity." . . .

THE END



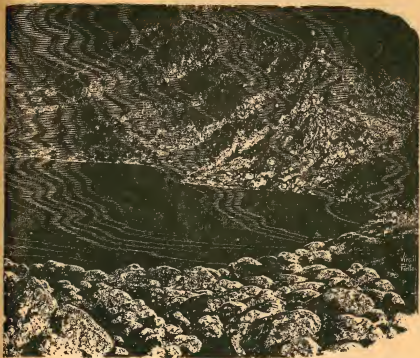


Before EDEN

By ARTHUR C. CLARKE

I GUESS," said Jerry Garfield, cutting the engines, "that this is the end of the line." With a gentle sigh, the underjets faded out; deprived of its air-cushion, the scout-car *Rambling Wreck* settled down upon the twisted rocks of the Hesperian Plateau.

There was no way forward; neither on its jets nor its tractors could S.5—to give the *Wreck* its official name—scale the escarpment that lay ahead. The South Pole of Venus was only thirty miles away, but it might have been on another planet. They



Illustrated by FINLAY

Venus wasn't the virgin planet Mankind had always assumed. It was simply that we got there too soon.

would have to turn back, and retrace their four-hundred-mile journey through this nightmare landscape.

The weather was fantastically clear, with visibility of almost a thousand yards. There was no need of radar to show the cliffs

ahead; for once, the naked eye was good enough. The green auroral light, filtering down through clouds that had rolled unbroken for a million years, gave the scene an underwater appearance, and the way in which all distant objects blurred into

the haze added to the impression. Sometimes it was easy to believe that they were driving across a shallow sea-bed, and more than once Jerry had imagined that he had seen fish floating overhead.

"Shall I call the ship, and say we're turning back?" he asked.

"Not yet," said Dr. Hutchins. "I want to think."

Jerry shot an appealing glance at the third member of the crew, but found no moral support there. Coleman was just as bad; although the two men argued furiously half the time, they were both scientists and therefore, in the opinion of a hard-headed engineer-navigator, not wholly responsible citizens. If Cole and Hutch had bright ideas about going forward, there was nothing he could do except register a protest.

HUTCHINS was pacing back and forth in the tiny cabin, studying charts and instruments. Presently he swung the car's searchlight towards the cliffs, and began to examine them carefully with binoculars. Surely, thought Jerry, he doesn't expect me to drive up there! S.5 was a hover-track, not a mountain goat. . . .

Abruptly, Hutchins found something. He released his breath in a sudden explosive gasp, then turned to Coleman.

"Look!" he said, his voice full

of excitement. "Just to the left of that black mark! Tell me what you see."

He handed over the glasses, and it was Coleman's turn to stare.

"Well I'm damned," he said at length. "You were right. There *are* rivers on Venus. That's a dried-up waterfall."

"So you owe me one dinner at the Bel Gourmet when we get back to Cambridge. With champagne."

"No need to remind me. Anyway, it's cheap at the price. But this still leaves your other theories strictly on the crackpot level."

"Just a minute," interjected Jerry. "What's all this about rivers and waterfalls? Everyone knows they can't exist on Venus. It never gets cold enough on this steam-bath of a planet for the clouds to condense."

"Have you looked at the thermometer lately?" asked Hutchins with deceptive mildness.

"I've been slightly too busy driving."

"Then I've news for you. It's down to 230, and still falling. Don't forget—we're almost at the Pole, it's wintertime, and we're sixty thousand feet above the lowlands. All this adds up to a distinct nip in the air. If the temperature drops a few more degrees, we'll have rain. The water will be boiling, of course—but it will be water. And though George

won't admit it yet, this puts Venus in a completely different light."

"Why?" asked Jerry, though he had already guessed.

"Where there's water, there may be life. We've been in too much of a hurry to assume that Venus is sterile, merely because the average temperature's over five hundred degrees. It's a lot colder here, and that's why I've been so anxious to get to the Pole. There are lakes up here in the highlands, and I want to look at them."

"But *boiling* water!" protested Coleman. "Nothing could live in that!"

"There are algae that manage it on Earth. And if we've learned one thing since we started exploring the planets, it's this—wherever Life has the slightest chance of surviving, you'll find it. This is the only chance it's ever had on Venus."

"I wish we could test your theory. But you can see for yourself—we can't go up that cliff."

"Perhaps not in the car. But it won't be too difficult to climb those rocks, even wearing thermosuits. All we need do is walk a few miles towards the Pole; according to the radar maps, it's fairly level once you're over the rim. We could manage in—oh, twelve hours at the most. Each of us has been out for longer than that, in much worse conditions."

That was perfectly true. Protective clothing that had been designed to keep men alive in the Venusian lowlands would have an easy job here, where it was only a hundred degrees hotter than Death Valley in midsummer.

"Well," said Coleman. "You know the regulations. You can't go by yourself, and someone has to stay here to keep contact with the ship. How do we settle it this time—chess or cards?"

"Chess takes too long," said Hutchins, "especially when you two play it." He reached into the chart table and produced a well-worn pack. "Cut them, Jerry."

"Ten of spades. Hope you can beat it, George."

"So' do I. Damn—only five of clubs. Well, give my regards to the Venusians."

DESPITE Hutchins' assurance, it was hard work climbing the escarpment. The slope was not too steep, but the weight of oxygen gear, refrigerated thermosuit and scientific equipment came to more than a hundred pounds per man. The lower gravity—thirteen percent weaker than Earth's—gave a little help, but not much, as they toiled up scree, rested on ledges to regain breath, and then clambered on again through the submarine twilight. The emerald glow that washed around them was brighter than that of the full

moon on Earth. A moon would have been wasted on Venus, Jerry told himself; it could never have been seen from the surface, there were no oceans for it to rule—and the incessant aurora was a far more constant source of light.

They had climbed over two thousand feet before the ground levelled out into a gentle slope, scarred here and there by channels that had clearly been cut by running water. After a little searching, they came across a gully wide and deep enough to merit the name of river-bed, and started to walk along it.

"I've just thought of something," said Jerry after they had travelled a few hundred yards. "Suppose there's a storm up ahead of us? I don't feel like facing a tidal wave of boiling water."

"If there's a storm," replied Hutchins a little impatiently, "we'll hear it. There'll be plenty of time to reach high ground."

He was undoubtedly right, but Jerry felt no happier as they continued to climb the gently-shelving water-course. His uneasiness had been growing ever since they had passed over the brow of the cliff and had lost radio contact with the scout-car. In this day and age, to be out of touch with one's fellowmen was a unique and unsettling experience. It had never happened to

Jerry before in all his life; even aboard the *Morning Star*, when they were a hundred million miles from Earth, he could always send a message to his family and get a reply back within minutes. But now, a few yards of rock had cut him off from the rest of mankind; if anything happened to them here, no-one would ever know, unless some later expedition found their bodies. George would wait for the agreed number of hours; then he would head back to the ship—alone. I guess I'm not really the pioneering type, Jerry told himself. I like running complicated machines, and that's how I got involved in space-flight. But I never stopped to think where it would lead, and now it's too late to change my mind.

THEY had travelled perhaps three miles towards the Pole, following the meanders of the river-bed, when Hutchins stopped to make observations and collect specimens. "Still getting colder!" he said. "The temperature's down to 199. That's far and away the lowest ever recorded on Venus. I wish we could call George and let him know."

Jerry tried all the wavebands; he even attempted to raise the ship—the unpredictable ups and downs of the planet's ionosphere sometimes made such long-distance reception possible—but

there was not a whisper of a carrier-wave above the roar and crackle of the Venusian thunderstorms.

"This is even better," said Hutchins, and now there was real excitement in his voice. "The oxygen concentration's way up—fifteen parts in a million. It was only five back at the car, and down in the lowlands you can scarcely detect it."

"But fifteen in a *million*!" protested Jerry. "Nothing could breathe that!"

"You've got hold of the wrong end of the stick," Hutchins explained. "Nothing does breathe it. Something *makes* it. Where do you think Earth's oxygen comes from? It's all produced by life—by growing plants. Before there were plants on Earth, our atmosphere was just like this one—a mess of carbon dioxide and ammonia and methane. Then vegetation evolved, and slowly converted the atmosphere into something that animals could breathe."

"I see," said Jerry, "and you think that the same process has just started here?"

"It looks like it. *Something* not far from here is producing oxygen—and plant life is the simplest explanation."

"And where there are plants," mused Jerry, "I suppose you'll have animals, sooner or later."

"Yes," said Hutchins, packing

his gear and starting up the gully, "though it takes a few hundred million years. We may be too soon—but I hope not."

"That's all very well," Jerry answered. "But suppose we meet something that doesn't like us? We've no weapons."

"And we don't need them. Have you stopped to think what we look like? Obviously any animal would run a mile at the sight of us."

There was some truth in that. The reflecting metal foil of their thermosuits covered them from head to foot like flexible, glittering armor. No insects had more elaborate antennae than those mounted on their helmets and back-packs, and the wide lenses through which they stared out at the world looked like blank yet monstrous eyes. Yes, there were few animals on Earth that would stop to argue with such apparitions; but any Venusians might have different ideas.

JERRY was still mulling this over when they came upon the lake. Even at that first glimpse, it made him think not of the life they were seeking, but of death. Like a black mirror, it lay amid a fold of the hills; its far edge was hidden in the eternal mist, and ghostly columns of vapor swirled and danced upon its surface. All it needed, Jerry told himself, was Charon's ferry

waiting to take them to the other side—or the Swan of Tuonela swimming majestically back and forth as it guarded the entrance to the Underworld. . . .

Yet for all this, it was a miracle—the first free water that men had ever found on Venus. Hutchins was already on his knees, almost in an attitude of prayer. But he was only collecting drops of the precious liquid to examine through his pocket microscope.

"Anything there?" asked Jerry anxiously.

Hutchins shook his head.

"If there is, it's too small to see with this instrument. I'll tell you more when we're back at the ship". He sealed a test-tube and placed it in his collecting-bag, as tenderly as any prospector who had just found a nugget laced with gold. It might be—it probably was—nothing more than plain water. But it might also be a universe of unknown, living creatures on the first stage of their billion-year journey to intelligence.

Hutchins had walked no more than a dozen yards along the edge of the lake when he stopped again, so suddenly that Garfield nearly collided with him.

"What's the matter?" Jerry asked. "Seen something?"

"That dark patch of rock over there. I noticed it before we stopped at the lake."

"What about it? It looks ordinary enough to me."

"I think it's grown bigger."

All his life, Jerry was to remember this moment. Somehow he never doubted Hutchins's statement; by this time he could believe anything, even that rocks could grow. The sense of isolation and mystery, the presence of that dark and brooding lake, the never-ceasing rumble of distant storms and the green flickering of the aurora—all these had done something to his mind, had prepared it to face the incredible. Yet he felt no fear; that would come later.

HE looked at the rock. It was about five hundred feet away, as far as he could estimate. In this dim, emerald light it was hard to judge distances or dimensions. The rock—or whatever it was—seemed to be a horizontal slab of almost black material, lying near the crest of a low ridge. There was a second, much smaller, patch of similar material near it; Jerry tried to measure and memorize the gap between them, so that he would have some yard-stick to detect any change.

Even when he saw that the gap was slowly shrinking, he still felt no alarm—only a puzzled excitement. Not until it had vanished completely, and he realized how his eyes had tricked him,

did that awful feeling of helpless terror strike into his heart.

Here were no growing or moving rocks. What they were watching was a dark tide, a crawling carpet, sweeping slowly but inexorably towards them over the top of the ridge.

The moment of sheer, unreasoning panic lasted, mercifully, no more than a few seconds. Garfield's first terror began to fade as soon as he recognized its cause. For that advancing tide had reminded him, all too vividly, of a story he had read many years ago about the army ants of the Amazon, and the way in which they destroyed everything in their path. . . .

But whatever this tide might be, it was moving too slowly to be a real danger, unless it cut off their line of retreat. Hutchins was staring at it intently through their only pair of binoculars; he was the biologist, and he was holding his ground. No point in making a fool of myself, thought Jerry, by running like a scalded cat, if it isn't necessary.

"For heaven's sake," he said at last, when the moving carpet was only a hundred yards away and Hutchins had not uttered a word or stirred a muscle. "What is it?"

Hutchins slowly unfroze, like a statue coming to life.

"Sorry," he said. "I'd forgotten all about you. It's a plant, of

course. At least, I suppose we'd better call it that."

"But it's *moving*!"

"Why should that surprise you? So do terrestrial plants. Ever seen speeded-up movies of ivy in action?"

"That still stays in one place—it doesn't crawl all over the landscape."

"Then what about the plankton plants of the sea? *They* can swim when they have to."

Jerry gave up; in any case, the approaching wonder had robbed him of words.

HE still thought of the thing as a carpet—a deep pile one, unravelled into tassles at the edges. It varied in thickness as it moved; in some parts it was a mere film; in others, it heaped up to a depth of a foot or more. As it came closer and he could see its texture, Jerry was reminded of black velvet. He wondered what it felt like to the touch, then remembered that it would burn his fingers even if it did nothing else to them. He found himself thinking, in the light-headed nervous reaction that often follows a sudden shock: "If there *are* any Venusians, we'll never be able to shake hands with them. They'd burn us, and we'd give them frost-bite."

So far, the thing had shown no signs that it was aware of their presence. It had merely flowed

forward like the mindless tide that it almost certainly was. Apart from the fact that it climbed over small obstacles, it might have been an advancing flood of water.

And then, when it was only ten feet away, the velvet tide checked itself. On the right and the left, it still flowed forward; but dead ahead it slowed to a halt.

"We're being encircled," said Jerry anxiously. "Better fall back, until we're sure it's harmless."

To his relief, Hutchins stepped back at once. After a brief hesitation, the creature resumed its slow advance and the dent in its front line straightened out.

Then Hutchins stepped forward again—and the thing slowly withdrew. Half a dozen times the biologist advanced, only to retreat again, and each time the living tide ebbed and flowed in synchronism with his movements. I never imagined, Jerry told himself, that I'd live to see a man waltzing with a plant. . . .

"Thermophobia," said Hutchins. "Purely automatic reaction. It doesn't like our heat."

"Our heat!" protested Jerry. "Why, we're living icicles by comparison."

"Of course—but our suits aren't, and that's all it knows about."

Stupid of me, thought Jerry.

When you were snug and cool inside your thermosuit, it was easy to forget that the refrigeration unit on your back was pumping a blast of heat out into the surrounding air. No wonder the Venusian plant had shied away.

"Let's see how it reacts to light," said Hutchins. He switched on his chest-lamp, and the green auroral glow was instantly banished by the flood of pure white radiance. Until Man had come to this planet, no white light had ever shone upon the surface of Venus, even by day. As in the seas of Earth, there was only a green twilight, deepening slowly to utter darkness.

THE transformation was so stunning that neither man could check a cry of astonishment. Gone in a flash was the deep, sombre black of the thick-piled velvet carpet at their feet. Instead, as far as their lights carried, lay a glazing pattern of glorious, vivid reds, laced with streaks of gold. No Persian prince could ever have commanded so opulent a tapestry from his weavers, yet this was the accidental product of biological forces. Indeed, until they had switched on their floods, these superb colors had not even existed, and they would vanish once more when the alien light of Earth ceased to conjure them into being.

"Tikov was right," murmured Hutchins. "I wish he could have known."

"Right about what?" asked Jerry, though it seemed almost a sacrilege to speak in the presence of such loveliness.

"Back in Russia, fifty years ago, he found that plants living in very cold climates tended to be blue and violet, while those from hot ones were red or orange. He predicted that the Martian vegetation would be violet, and said that if there were plants on Venus they'd be red. Well, he was right on both counts. But we can't stand here all day—we've work to do."

"You're sure it's quite safe?" asked Jerry, some of his caution reasserting itself.

"Absolutely—it can't touch our suits even if it wants to. Anyway, it's moving past us."

That was true. They could see now that the entire creature—if it was a single plant, and not a colony—covered a roughly circular area about a hundred yards across. It was sweeping over the ground, as the shadow of a cloud moves before the wind—and where it had rested, the rocks were pitted with innumerable tiny holes that might have been etched by acid.

"Yes," said Hutchins, when Jerry remarked about this. "That's how some lichens feed; they secrete acids that dissolve

rock. But no questions, please—not till we get back to the ship. I've several lifetime's work here, and a couple of hours to do it in."

This was botany on the run. . . . The sensitive edge of the huge plant-thing could move with surprising speed when it tried to evade them. It was as if they were dealing with an animated flap-jack, an acre in extent. There was no reaction—apart from the automatic avoidance of their exhaust-heat—when Hutchins snipped samples or took probes. The creature flowed steadily onwards over hills and valleys, guided by some strange vegetable instinct. Perhaps it was following some vein of mineral; the geologists could decide that, when they analyzed the rock samples that Hutchins had collected both before and after the passage of the living tapestry.

There was scarcely time to think or even to frame the countless questions that their discovery had raised. Presumably these creatures must be fairly common, for them to have found one so quickly. How did they reproduce? By shoots, spores, fission, or some other means? Where did they get their energy? What relatives, rivals or parasites did they have? This could not be the only form of life on Venus—the very idea was absurd, for if you had one species, you must have thousands. . . .

SHEER hunger and fatigue forced them to a halt at last. The creature they were studying could eat its way around Venus—though Hutchins believed that it never went very far from the lake, as from time to time it approached the water and inserted a long, tube-like tendril into it—but the animals from Earth had to rest.

It was a great relief to inflate the pressurized tent, climb in through the airlock, and strip off their thermosuits. For the first time, as they relaxed inside their tiny plastic hemisphere, the true wonder and importance of the discovery forced itself upon their minds. This world around them was no longer the same; Venus was no longer dead—it had joined Earth and Mars.

For life called to life, across the gulfs of space. Everything that grew or moved upon the face of any planet was a portent, a promise that Man was not alone in this universe of blazing suns and swirling nebulae. If as yet he had found no companions with whom he could speak, that was only to be expected, for the light-years and the ages still stretched before him, waiting to be explored. Meanwhile, he must guard and cherish the life he found, whether it be upon Earth or Mars or Venus.

So Graham Hutchins, the hap-
piest biologist in the Solar Sys-

tem, told himself as he helped Garfield collect their refuse and seal it into a plastic disposal bag. When they deflated the tent and started on the homeward journey, there was no sign of the creature they had been examining. That was just as well; they might have been tempted to linger for more experiments, and already it was getting uncomfortably close to their deadline.

No matter; in a few months they would be back with a team of assistants, far more adequately equipped and with the eyes of the world upon them. Evolution had labored for a billion years to make this meeting possible; it could wait a little longer.

For a while nothing moved in the greenly glimmering, fog-bound landscape; it was deserted by man and crimson carpet alike. Then, flowing over the wind-carved hills, the creature reappeared. Or perhaps it was another of the same strange species; no one would ever know.

It flowed past the little cairn of stones where Hutchins and Garfield had buried their wastes. And then it stopped.

It was not puzzled, for it had no mind. But the chemical urges that drove it relentlessly over the polar plateau were crying: Here, here! Somewhere close at hand was the most precious of all the foods it needed—phosphorous,
(Continued on page 66)

A TIME TO DIE

By HAROLD CALIN



Illustrated
by FINLAY

Capt. Kingsford cleaved the depths of space in a monomaniacal search for his personal devil. The tale of what happens when he finds it is reminiscent, on a cosmic scale, of Moby Dick. For every man like Kingsford, is there a white whale?

HEROES are not brave men; they are the fortunate victims of circumstance. They perform an act in life for which one usually pays with that life. But they do it with an unusual out-

come. They do not die. So they are heroes. Captain Robert Kingsford returned alive from the first expedition to Aldebaran IX. He returned alone. He also commanded the second expedition. I was, or perhaps I should say, still am executive officer on this second expedition. If there is ever a third expedition here, Kingsford will not be the commander. This time he did not become a hero. He became a very stupid, very dead man.

I finished my fourth tour of duty in S Force about nine years ago. The third and fourth tours, as you know if you are familiar with S Force, were voluntary. Two is the limit they figure a man should spend in deep space on assigned duty. By the third, if he has not achieved a command, or rank at the least, he might be somewhat loathe to spend three years on a cruise not of his own choosing. After my fourth tour I sat for exams and got my captain's papers, so I signed on for a two-tour contract with an outfit operating Star Class Scouts out of Alpha Centauri X. By the end of this contract, I'd had it with space, and I settled down to a nice life of ease. You know, fishing and a house by the sea in the tropics, and a boat. That, of course, is where I made my mistake. You don't break the habits of over

twenty years merely by putting some idle wishes into fulfillment. I reflect on it now because that idiotic notion about retirement is probably why I am here. That, and the determination of Captain Robert Kingsford to be a hero again, with remaining witnesses to bear him out.

I spend so much talk on myself at this point, incidentally, because I have lots of time in which to do this. Time to do anything I please, as if there was anything to do beside this. Except for the periods of hiding, of course. The hiding isn't bad, either. One gets used to it.

I've done this thing, this writing it all down, though it is on slates with a sharp stone as a stylus, about fifteen times. I've never found traces of the other times I've written it, and somehow I feel it should all be down. In the beginning, just to express one's thoughts, even in writing, was enough. After a while, however, you sort of want to talk with someone, even if there is no one to talk with. I guess I've told myself this thing about a hundred times, in addition to the writings. It's changed a bit with the tellings. Also, I've never quite finished it. So actually, I'm creating the epic saga of a race. A race of which I am the sole member, and with no heirs apparent.

Well, it makes the time pass.

I, Philip Rogers, known as "Buck" to my less imaginative and non-spacemen acquaintances, decided to have done with retirement on Barbados after three years of the kind of living toward which all men strive. I had resided and dined in opulence, I had fished, I had traveled within the confines of atmospheric craft and I had seen the whole world. But living for itself, just as survival for itself, can be pretty well the same as death, and believe me, I can deliver virtuosic discourses on both subjects. Both tend to instill a certain cessation of all feeling. For that reason, incidentally, I've actually grown to look forward to the periods of hiding here. It's the only time I truly feel anything. But to get on, I got pretty well fed up with Barbados and the boat and the house. I had never married, principally because I'd never been fond of the idea of a woman standing on some widow's walk waiting for me. Three year cruises in deep space were hardly the short business trips of a commercial traveler. I had also, I imagine, never met the right woman. When I realized that this tropic paradise was becoming little more than a sort of waiting room for the voyage to hell or wherever I'll go, I began to cast feelers into the only other world I knew. I made certain in-

quiries among commercial space outfits for the possibility of a berth. I had let my papers lapse and learned that I was no longer eligible for a command. This was no great loss to me, since doing something was the primary objective. I could still gain an Exec's berth on any non-atmospheric craft. I reactivated my status, got my First Officer's papers, and was about to sign on for a mining expedition in the third asteroid belt of Alpha Centauri, when Kingsford completed his solo return from Aldebaran IX.

Basing speculations on the future profits to be had from Aldebaran IX, according to Kingsford's report, Anglo-Galactic Mining began almost immediately to outfit a new ship for a second expedition. I heard a bit of Kingsford's story, the landing, the surveys, the planet being almost a total ore deposit, and then the tragedy of the crew. One of Anglo-Galactic's geologists told me Kingsford's tale of how all of his crew was killed by being drawn up in the feeding action of some gigantic flying animal, how he alone had managed to avoid this horror, and his agonizing fourteen month voyage back all alone.

I thought I was well able to imagine the feeling of being a sole survivor on an alien world, let alone the almost superhuman task of activating a ship's drive,

even with delayed action timing, and plotting a course and manning a craft through fourteen months in space alone.

They were recruiting a complete crew for Kingsford's new ship, the Algonquin. She was new throughout, the drive and astrogating equipment being of a design with which I was unfamiliar. I began to understand why I was no longer eligible for command. A short three year absence and space technology had passed me by. I had read about the Shaller drive system in a technical journal during my retirement, but all through those three years I had made a rather strenuous effort to stay away from anything to do with my former calling. Actually, the Shaller system had outstripped all former star drives and was now in almost exclusive use in all ships geared for long range space penetration. It had conquered inertial resistance to the point where there existed absolutely no problems or stresses to either craft or personnel during acceleration and deceleration. If Kingsford's report about Aldebaran IX were true, and assays of the ore he'd brought back seemed to promise even more than he did, a berth on the Algonquin would be quite a prize. I flew to London and arranged a preliminary interview with an Anglo-Galactic vice president

whom I had known for years. This would take some politics. From what I could figure, an Executive Officer's berth on the Algonquin, if she should make the strike that seemed imminent, would be worth millions, at the one-twentieth share normally apportioned to Execs on exploratory mining expeditions.

"Naturally, Kingsford will command," I was told. "But if you've a rated Exec's papers, Rogers, I think we may swing it." It would mean ten percent of my share, but the requisite of portions of officers' shares is one of the fringe benefits enjoyed by executives of corporations like Anglo-Galactic. There were two others with Executive tickets being touted by other politics within Anglo-Galactic, but my past record, my S Force dossier and my age were tremendous determinants. Or, perhaps, my politics were stronger. I was chosen and signed on for the expedition. I had still not met Kingsford. This was a bit odd. After all, I was to be his executive officer, his immediate subordinate, and I had not even been requested to present myself for his appraisal before selection.

AFTER signing the contract, I was given a manifest of the ship, a complete set of drawings, and a small library of technical data for brushing up as well as

familiarizing myself with the Shaller system theory and everything else that had rendered me somewhat obsolete during my retirement.

I came aboard ship three days before departure, still not having met any of the crew, let alone Kingsford. I was greeted by a junior Officer of the Day.

"Rogers," I said. "Philip Rogers. I'm the new Exec."

"I'm Williams," he said. "Welcome aboard the Algonquin, sir."

"This is quite a ship. A bit more than I'm familiar with."

"She's a bit more than most of us are familiar with," Williams said. "Isn't she a beauty?"

"I hope she shakes down without too many kicks."

"Yes, sir. Captain Kingsford is expecting you."

"Is he aboard?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

I rapped on the hatch, and as I entered his cabin the captain rose to greet me. The first thing I noticed, was the eye patch. I had seen photographs of him taken since his return, but he had worn no patch then.

"Mr. Rogers," he said and extended his hand. "Welcome aboard."

He held his face slightly to one side, as if to give his one seeing eye as full a field of vision as possible. He noticed my preoccupation with the eye patch.

"I traveled fourteen months

with a big hole here, Mr. Rogers," he said, motioning toward the patch. "I left my right eye where we are going." Then he closed his good eye and was silent for a time. I grew to accept these silences during conversations with him. "They fitted me with a false one when I returned, but advised against my wearing it in space. It's just as well. It gave me bad headaches. The patch is the same, but I don't feel a solid object lodged in my head. This is much better. Well, Mr. Rogers, what do you think of the Algonquin?"

"She's quite a ship, the little I've seen, sir."

"Yes. Mr. Rogers, I am a man disinclined to consorting with my crews. Your main duty aboard will be to convey my orders and requests to the crew. For all intensive purposes, you will appear to be in command. I suppose you have been well briefed on the purpose of this venture. If we succeed, and we shall, you will return a very rich man."

"I already am pretty well off," I said.

"I did not say pretty well off, Mr. Rogers. I said very rich. But, be that as it may, you have the look of a good officer about you. We'll get on, I'm sure."

"I hope so, sir," I said.

"You've had your own commands, Mr. Rogers. It's one of

the reasons I'm glad you're with me. You are familiar with the problems of command. How is it that you were so lax as to let your papers lapse? Your command record is excellent."

"I was retired," I said. "I didn't think I'd ever need them."

"But the old habits do not die, do they?"

"I guess you can put it that way."

He looked at me and was quiet for a time. Then he looked up. "Have you ever felt, Mr. Rogers, that the whole of the universe was put together wrong? That perhaps man was placed here to undo some of God's bad work? Have you? Have you ever wished that all your life could be different? Have you ever seen evil? True evil, or its absolute personification?"

"I may have," I said. "But I've done well not to let my imagination run too rampant at times like that."

"Mr. Rogers, do you know how I lost my crew on the Essex?" The Essex had been Kingsford's command on the first expedition to Aldebaran IX.

"I've heard bits of it," I said.

"Aldebaran IX is a very strange planet. The atmosphere is extremely dense, entirely breatheable, you understand, but dense almost to the point where you could compare it to water.

The atmosphere is a true ocean of air. The surface of the planet has barren areas, trenches, shelves, sections of almost jungle-like undergrowth, and a very hazardously deceptive feeling of warmth. It has no intelligent life. But it does have life. I can assure you of that. It has life. I experienced some of its life." Here, he paused again. When he resumed, his thoughts had gone beyond the life of Aldebaran IX. "Every ounce of matter on that planet contains the highest percentage of ore my counters have ever recorded. Ore, Mr. Rogers, the Ultimate Ore. The ore for which forty-two men under my command died. I intend that the dependents of those men will reap the benefits of that ore. I have instructed that my entire share be distributed among these heirs. This bit of information is to go no further than yourself, you understand."

"I understand," I said.

"Mr. Rogers," he then said, "were any of your past commands of a military nature?"

"How do you mean, sir?"

"Well, on an alien world, for example, have you ever organized a tactical reconnaissance program? Or perhaps planned a system of self covering defense positions?"

"Naturally," I said. "Military sciences are a large part of S Force operation."

"This I know, Mr. Rogers. But have you ever put these sciences into practise?"

"Yes, sir," I said. "May I ask why you wanted to know?"

"No, Mr. Rogers. But it is very good to have you aboard. Thank you, Mr. Rogers." He turned his attention suddenly to a manual on his desk. The interview seemed to be over. I left.

WE spent the next few weeks at the Lunar base undergoing extensive testing. Finally the ship was ready for commissioning. Kingsford appeared to accept command and we lifted from orbit, locked into the pre-taped course and set about the business of a crushingly inactive fourteen months of transit.

In all that I have written of the Algonquin incident, I have tried to portray Kingsford correctly. I don't know yet as I have succeeded. He was almost a complete recluse aboard ship. I virtually commanded, as he had predicted during our first conversation. When I did see him, it was to deliver routine reports on the ship and crew, but I began to observe that even these reports did not particularly interest him. He had stopped shaving and had grown a long, very full dark beard. That, together with the eye patch, gave him the look of a very ancient mystic. He was always reading when I entered his

cabin. His readings were restricted to the writings of St. Augustine, *The City Of God* I believe the volume was, and one or another of the first books of the Old Testament. After about nine months of my routine monologues, I stopped reporting altogether, and didn't see him for about three weeks. Nor did I receive any summons from him.

Then, during one of my periods of watch in the control room, I received a signal to report to the Captain's cabin. I entered, observed that despite his solitude the cabin and every accessory was in perfect order, nothing out of place. I knew that he allowed no orderly to enter the cabin, and yet there was no evidence that here was a man who was virtually a prisoner of his own choosing. We spoke for many hours that time. He asked about my past, my period of retirement, my reading habits, what I had read and what I thought of these readings. The conversation was limited almost entirely to myself, but Kingsford as an entity began to emerge for the first time since I had met him. He was altogether friendly. He wanted to know whether I was familiar with the Bible. When I said I was, he asked which section interested me most. I told him Ecclesiastes.

"Why Ecclesiastes, Mr. Rogers?"

"Well, because it seems to pretty well sum up all of life."

"There is far more to all of life than just vanity," he said.

"There is also far more to Ecclesiastes than just vanity," I said. "But I do imagine one could speak of purposes in life, and all of that. But aren't these in themselves a sort of vanity? Actually, we're not put here for any real reason. I don't think so, anyway. I've always felt that man is quite the master of his own destiny."

"And yet, Mr. Rogers, here you are," he said, smiling now, "aboard the Algonquin, after having quite conclusively decided that a life of grace and leisure was your true destiny. Do you not believe that perhaps your whole life was destined for that of a space officer? Perhaps molded from the very moment you were born to serve as my Executive Officer during this expedition?"

"I prefer to believe that I had stronger politics with Anglo-Galactic than the others who were after this berth."

"Do you really? Well, that's interesting enough. And tell me, Mr. Rogers, what of the crew? Do they still hold your faith to the last man?"

"I've seen enough men in enough situations to know that one cannot vouch for every man, even for himself, Captain. I still

believe they are a good enough crew, yes."

"Good enough for what?"

I looked at him, smiling. "I believe that was actually a question for me to ask you."

"You think so? Perhaps. But, nonetheless, have any of them lost faith in Aldebaran IX?"

"I think it would be wise for you to address them and judge that for yourself," I said. "At this point, Captain, it's no more than any man aboard deserves."

"Nobody deserves anything, Mr. Rogers," he said firmly. "Don't you forget that. Keep them busy, Mr. Rogers. They shall have their wealth. Their speculations on that wealth is all that need concern them. And I shall have mine."

"Do you intend to address the crew at any time before we reach Aldebaran IX?"

"In good time, Mr. Rogers," he said. "In good time."

THAT was very much the way it went, Kingsford sticking to his cabin, reading his Bible, and the men occupying the monotony of space penetration with conjectures on their futures and on Aldebaran IX.

It took four more months to raise Aldebaran. When we ran onto the range of Aldebaran, things grew a bit tricky. There were no truly accurate charts, no perfectly matched coordinates for

absolute bearings, only the tape of the Essex's astro-officer to trail in on. We set the tape and locked the controls in on them and turned all the scanners up full. We proceeded at ten percent power, gradually drawing in on the solar system of the red star, setting a solar orbit and drawing in toward the nebula of its system. Here, the Essex's tape became useless. They had made eight approaches before striking a parallel orbit, had not recorded the orbital timing of the various outer planets of the system, and had sort of felt their way into the ninth planet. We would be obliged to do the same thing. Throne, the astrogation officer, took over control and eased the Algonquin down, decelerating gradually over a period of seven hours. He then brought us to a complete halt and looked up at me.

"We'll have to go back out and start over, sir," he said. "I have insufficient data to bring us through correctly. It might take weeks. I don't understand how the Essex made it. Probably a big piece of luck."

We lifted out of the solar plane and set the computers to coordinating positional data on Aldebaran's system. This time, the Essex's tapes were unnecessary. Throne plotted an exact course, determined to strike the ninth planet at the apogee of its orbit.

None of Aldebaran's planets, incidentally, hold anywhere near a circular orbit. There are six belts of what can be classed as asteroids. These were very likely planets, or pairs of planets, at one time, but before the multi-rhythmed cycle of Aldebaran's system established itself, these planets ceased to exist, through what cataclysmic collisions I could not even begin to imagine.

We struck an orbit about Aldebaran IX without fault, and Throne returned command to me. There was a general announcement made throughout the ship that we were in orbit about the objective planet and shortly thereafter, the voice of Captain Kingsford, for the first time during the voyage, came over the communications system.

"Attention. This is Captain Kingsford speaking. Mr. Rogers will supervise the locking of all controls into this orbit about our objective, and members of the crew will assemble on the main deck. I wish to address you. My compliments to Mr. Throne on a fine piece of ship handling in this rudimentarily charted area. Thank you, Mr. Throne. In ten minutes, then, gentlemen." The men all looked up, as if suddenly reawakened to the fact that there was an officer aboard who was my superior.

"Well," I said, "I guess you'll now meet Capt. Kingsford."

WE secured into orbit and made our way to the main deck. It was the first time in well over a year that all the men were there together, the first time since the commissioning ceremony. I remember now that I thought for a brief instant of how few of the men I had actually spoken more than several words with, how taut and almost mechanical this entire trip had been, how the crew held a common bond as in other ships, but not of friendship as on other ships on which I had served. Here it was an alliance against the unknown. The unknown, represented not so much by Aldebaran IX, but by Captain Kingsford.

He entered the main deck through the hatch from the officers' quarters and all motion and sound among the crew stopped. He walked silently to the center of the deck, nodded briefly at me, and turned to face the men.

"Here are the facts on Aldebaran IX as I know them. The assays performed on the ore I brought back display a potential yield of almost ninety percent pure uranium. Ninety percent, gentlemen. You are, I am sure, aware of what this can mean for every last one of us. The extraction of this ore amounts to little more than erecting loaders on almost any

site, and automatic conveyors to the refinery we will assemble for reducing the ore to a pure state. Our reaction engineers will then convey the element through the reaction process by which we will return to Earth with a hold filled with true plutonium. This is almost an automatic procedure and can be accomplished with an absolute minimum of operational difficulty. You will ask, then, why I requisitioned a manifest of so large a crew. The answer to this is precaution.

"There is a manner of animal life on Aldebaran IX which it is necessary that we subdue. It is a form of flying animal, quite large, which feeds through a suction action, ingesting matter with tremendous force, as it flies. This action not only nourishes the beast, it also forms the fuel for the ejection of waste gases that are its power for flight, jet propulsion, in essence. The animal is omnivorous, quite fast in flight, and leaves an area barren in its trail. It also defies all manner of remote observation. It came upon us in the Essex completely by surprise, though all our scanners and force beams were activated. It was the cause of the death of the entire crew. I alone was inside the Essex at the time. I escaped with the mere loss of an eye. How I managed to be the one to survive I cannot say. Perhaps it

was fated that way. But, gentlemen, had we been prepared, had we been firmly entrenched and adequately armed, this beast would have presented no threat at all. We were not prepared then. Now we are. You are probably all familiar with the arsenal manifest. It was for this reason that I ordered the arms we now have on board.

"There has never been a reward without a hazard for men to face. This, then, is our hazard. And I assure you, no man has ever been within reach of so vast a reward. Is there anything else I can tell you? Mr. Rogers will establish a manner of arms distribution and a system of defense positions once we make landfall. We will bring the Algonquin down on a site I have already determined. The site where the Essex met her fate."

Here, Kingsford stopped speaking. Several of the men shifted slightly. There was some clearing of throats, but no voices.

"Are there no questions, then?" Kingsford asked. Again, no one spoke. Perhaps they were awed by the sight Kingsford presented. He had been seen by no one on board since the commissioning but myself and a junior officer who piloted the shuttle at Alpha Centauri X. They knew him without the eye patch or the beard. He seemed to have aged twenty years since the departure.

He had worn the false eye during the commissioning ceremony, and now, with the eyepatch and the beard, his face was darker, his expression pained.

PERHAPS the men chose to accept Kingsford's optimism in the face of the fate of the Essex, considering that they were now in orbit about Aldebaran IX, and little more could be done but effect a landing. Anything else could constitute mutiny, and the alternative was the fortune Kingsford promised each man.

"Good," Kingsford said. He smiled. "Now, as you might imagine, I have a personal interest in this animal we will hunt." He motioned to the eye patch. "I left this behind me last time. Not to mention a crew of forty two men." Here he paused in the way I had grown to know. His eye again focused on no particular object. After a time, he continued. He drew a paper from his tunic. "This, Mr. Rogers, is to be posted where all crew members can read it. I believe it will explain itself. Post it after we land." He handed me the sealed paper.

"Gentlemen," Kingsford said, "I thank you for your service. Are you with me in this business of Aldebaran IX and its flying animal?"

He smiled broadly. The men looked at one another, then slow-

ly began to smile. Pierce, the armorer, made his way to Kingsford, his hand extended.

"Sir," he said, as Kingsford grasped his hand and shook it, "it's been too long since I've been on a good hunt. I'm with you all the way."

"Good," Kingsford said. "You are Pierce, am I right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, Mr. Pierce."

That started it. The crew moved in on Kingsford, all shook his hand and pledged to do their share. After a long while, the camaraderie quieted down, and Kingsford excused himself, requesting Throne and me to join him in his cabin.

Kingsford sat down behind his desk and drew a chart from a file. He slid it across the desk so that Throne and I could see it.

"This is a photographic chart of one hemisphere of Aldebaran IX, gentlemen. I have marked the area in which the Essex was operating. There are many landmarks which you can use for triangular bearing to establish the exact position of the site. These are also marked, as you will note. Prior to the Essex landing, we dropped shuttles at many random points about the planet and drew cores and meter readings. This area proved to possess the greatest density of high percentage ore. It seems natural that we light here again. Do you have

sufficient data here, Mr. Throne?"

Throne moved the chart closer to himself and studied it quietly for a moment. "I should think so, sir," he said. "This red marking, here. Would that indicate a mountainous area?"

Kingsford leaned over the chart. "Yes," he said.

"Good," Throne said. "Then I understand the markings."

"Is there anything else I can tell you?"

"No, sir. This chart seems complete enough. I'll have the ship dropped from orbit and scan the surface. We should be able to pick up check points to match the chart all right."

"Or you can activate the counters, Mr. Throne. This ship is equipped with long range equipment. The point of highest incidence of count will be your mark."

"Yes, sir. Will you be at the controls?"

"For the landing, yes. Mr. Rogers and I will be in the control room shortly."

"I'll get to this immediately, then," Throne said.

He left the cabin and Kingsford shifted his gaze to me. "You seem disapproving of my methods, Mr. Rogers."

"Not really, sir. Just your timing. You can hardly call it fair to have kept to yourself during all these months."

"Perhaps, but remember one thing, Mr. Rogers. You have been my buffer during all these months. You are a conspirator to the silence. I think that my address to the crew brought them very much over to my side, don't you?"

"They haven't had time to think," I said. "Or maybe they don't know how to, or prefer not to. They might wonder why you waited until now to tell them about your hunting plans. They might begin to feel, much as I do now, that this whole trip should never have taken place."

"No, Mr. Rogers. It had to take place. It had to."

"Why?"

Kingsford didn't answer right away. He looked at me quietly for a time. Then a slow smile spread across his face.

"For the betterment of mankind, Mr. Rogers," he said. "You see, I believe that the crew of the Essex met a fate that was destined long before preliminary surveys of Aldebaran IX were even projected. Before, even, men developed the power to travel into space. It was a warning. That is my belief, and my faith."

He was interrupted by the communications buzzer. They had scanned the planet and matched the chart. Throne had located the landing site and we were awaited in the control room. We both stood.

"I take it, Mr. Rogers, that you are not with me in this Aldebaran venture."

"I am Executive Officer aboard this ship, Captain. I know the meaning of performing my duties. But if you are looking for moral approbation in all of this, I cannot give it. The way I put it all together, I think it would be less a waste if we were to raise ship right now and set a course directly for Earth."

"Why? Are you afraid, Mr. Rogers?"

"No. It's just that I'm not given much to the idea of playing God."

Kingsford stopped at the door. "I seem to have underestimated you, Mr. Rogers," he said. He opened the cabin hatch and stepped through.

THE setting down went off without a hitch, and the job of establishing Kingsford's precautionary system began. I was the first out of the ship, meeting the density of the atmosphere for which Kingsford had prepared me. It was thick, yet not oppressive like the heavy tropical atmosphere on Earth. It did not restrict movement, the gravitational force being less than that of Earth. One seemed to counterbalance the other to give a man equal physical capabilities to those on Earth. With Pierce, I scouted the area within a few

miles of the ship, chose certain high grounds for emplacements and watches, then returned and began the deployment of the arms and crew to the chosen spots. I worked out a schedule of rotation so that the outer emplacements would be manned for no more than three hours by any one group. During this entire operation, there was no sign of animal life on the planet. The climate seemed sub-tropical and vegetable life proportional to this climate abounded. Fruit trees and plains of grass, forests and spots of dense undergrowth, much like the greenery of a dozen planets I had seen. But there was no sound, and absolutely no discernible movement of air. The mountain chain I had seen noted on Kingsford's chart stood off in the far horizon, and the land about us was all rolling hills and plains.

During the apportioning of arms, I remembered Kingsford's paper to be posted. I got it from my cabin and read it. It was a public statement in which Kingsford offered ten percent of his captain's share to the first man to spot the quarry. This reduced the potential benefits to the heirs of the Essex's crew by ten percent. I noted the fact, but gave it little thought. It was Kingsford's affair. I opened the general communications switch and read the statement to the

crew. The response was electrifying. Shouts and cheers from every quarter of the ship. The general air of a group of sportsmen on a chase rapidly took over the whole feeling of the expedition, and, as executive officer charged with posting the watch, I was approached by most of the crew members with entreaties and even bribes by each, to be assigned to the outermost emplacements. Kingsford's methods certainly bore results. It kept everybody from thinking, but I do not believe that this was his intention.

I did not see Kingsford for almost two days. While I busied myself with the elaborate mechanisms of warning and defense, he and the small group of geologists and reaction engineers, who also insisted on drawing guard duty, went through the mechanics of erecting the loaders and converters, then the refining equipment for reducing the ore to its pure state, and the reactor that would further refine the prize to its absolute, the purpose for the whole expedition, a cargo of plutonium such as man had never seen.

During the two days of setting up the defense system, I grew to feel quite comfortable on Aldebaran IX. I roamed the hills and depressions, brought back certain fruits and vegetables and subjected them to tests and dis-

covered that they were entirely palatable. Perhaps these pastoral musings were a premonition on my part or simple scientific curiosity. I have never dwelt too long on it.

The planet cycle of Aldebaran IX is relatively short, about seventeen hours as measured on Earth. We grew accustomed to relatively short, but intensive periods of work and the remainder of the time was spent in sheer luxuriance at the idea of being out of doors after so many months in space. No sign of Kingsford's quarry appeared, and the excitement of the hunt began to dwindle somewhat among the crew. I, myself, lost much of my feeling of apprehension, and began to relax in the foretaste of future wealth. The reactor was completed on the second day, and the production of the man made element began. The second night, I dined with Kingsford.

AS my tension had relaxed, quite the opposite, it seemed, had happened to him. He was more brooding than ever, more responsive to the slightest sound. He ate practically nothing and said little. Late in the evening, he began to speak, seemingly for the first time aware that he had a guest.

"You wonder about my monster, Mr. Rogers, don't you?"

"Yes. I do wonder a bit."

"So do I. Do you still think it would be less waste if we had returned without making landfall?"

"I'd imagine it was a bit soon to say."

"Do you understand now, Mr. Rogers, why I maintained my silence about this place? Why I spoke little of the Essex and her crew? You have noticed, I am sure, that absolutely no vestige of either the crew or the equipment is to be seen. Only a newly green pasture where there was a desert when I escaped. Such is the devastation to which we might be subjected, except for your excellent defense pattern. A devastation so complete as to leave no sign of devastation whatsoever. Have you ever seen anything like it, Mr. Rogers?"

"No."

"This," he said, indicating the eye patch. "This is the only sign that forty-two men perished within five kilometers of this spot. And I have returned now. Now the waiting."

"I don't understand." I said.

"I told you once that I believe all this of Aldebaran IX was fated. I believe also that Aldebaran IX was so composed of uranium to be found and exploited for the complete betterment of mankind. That is the irony. For two hundred years, now, we have spoken of uncash-

ing the atom for the betterment of mankind. But what more has come of it than a highly developed science of the destruction of mankind, and the gradual debasing of the entire universe. Man must warrant his own betterment, Mr. Rogers, and it is therefore that Aldebaran IX was placed well within the reaches of Hell, a very deceptive Hell, but Hell no less. Man was meant to have achieved god-like proportions before he would discover this place. The men of the Essex were not god-like, believe me. Nor are the men of the Algonquin. Nor are you.

"Aldebaran IX is a world not meant for men to walk upon. It is a disguise. There are gardens and deserts, jungles and plains. But there are no oceans. The ocean here is the atmosphere. Should I have told the men of the Algonquin that in this ocean swims a Leviathan that defies the very existence we claim, Mr. Rogers? This is our adversary. This is the killer of the crew of the Essex. This is the sum total of man's stumbling blocks, his barrier to his own betterment. A giant, half the length of the Algonquin, almost its girth, with eyes each as large as a man.

"Kill him, Mr. Rogers, and you have conquered man's evil. You will see him. You will see why this had to be."

I could say nothing. I believed

then that he was more than a little mad, but he had instilled a strange fear in me. I wanted to be away from all of this. I wanted no part in this undoing of man's evil.

"I can only say that I feel that a man should be given a choice of participating or not in this madness," I said, the words sounding very dry and brittle.

"No, Mr. Rogers. No. Give man a choice and he will refuse."

"I must go now, Captain Kingsford. It's time I made my rounds of the emplacements."

"I'll join you, Mr. Rogers," he said, and we left the ship together. I never entered the hatch of the Algonquin again.

WE spent the entire night covering the perimeter of the defense positions. The emplacements were spaced at about half-mile intervals, each covering the other, and each manned by two of the crew. We had armed each position with a fixed base nuclear rifle of recoilless design, as well as small arms for the individual men. The night was pervaded by a heavy silence, broken only by the distant humming of the refinery and the reactor. The men at the emplacements spoke little. The spirit of the hunt, as I have said, had dwindled, but there was a feeling about this night that hung over all of us.

Along toward first light we

were heading back into the center of the camp, having completed a full circuit of the perimeter on foot. The suits we wore were light enough, despite the helmets we needed for communications, but there was still the feeling of restriction, even without the face plates. I was tired. I had gone almost twenty hours without sleep. As we walked, Kingsford held a hand to his head just above the eye patch. He had a headache and his good eye was red. He stopped a moment to rub the eye and take a cigarette from a packet in his tunic. He offered me one and struck his lighter so that we could light the cigarettes. Suddenly, he held his hand very still.

"Look, Mr. Rogers," he said. "Look. The flame. How it flickers. The air is moving. The air is moving, Mr. Rogers."

I turned my head up automatically, but detected no change in the stillness. Kingsford studied the flame and began to smile. Then my headset came alive with a voice.

"Captain. Captain Kingsford. This is Pierce. It's blowing up a breeze here. It's becoming a wind as I speak. The sun has not quite risen, but it's almost light enough. I don't see anything, but I feel the wind. It's stronger each second."

We could feel it now. Gradu-

ally at first, then stronger, the air began to stir and move in the direction of Pierce's emplacement. Other positions began to report the movement in the air. Then the first light of Aldebaran broke over the horizon in a brilliant red glow and we heard Pierce again.

"I see it," he called. "It's like a ship. It seems bigger than the Algonquin. Captain, it's moving toward us, but not directly at us. I make the distance to be about seven miles, but I can't be sure. I don't know how big it is. What's its size, Captain?"

"Has it a long snout and sort of a funnel at the front?" Kingsford demanded.

"Yes, sir. It's moving very fast and there's a cloud rising before it, and the cloud is disappearing into the funnel. I can hear it now. It must be closer than I thought. Lord, it's huge. The wind is much stronger now. It's getting difficult to breathe."

"And the eyes, Pierce. Can you see the eyes?"

"No, sir. But we can't breathe too well here now. It's coming closer. Closer."

We could see it now. It was moving in a direction generally toward the camp, but if it maintained its course, it would bypass us by a good distance. It was huge. Much greater than Kingsford had described, at least so it seemed. Slender at the front

and tapering to a huge girth near its tail. A great billow of dust rose before its path, disappearing in the bugle-like snout. The wind increased far beyond any I'd ever known, and then I could see the eyes.

"You see, Mr. Rogers," Kingsford shouted. "It has expected us. It is grown. Six times its size, Mr. Rogers. The men of the Essex nurtured it well. Ha!"

The men at all positions were calling over the communications, but none had fired their weapons yet.

"Commence firing," Kingsford shouted his order. He turned to me. "There, Mr. Rogers. There is your Leviathan." I could barely hear him for the wind. Then I realized that it was only because we had the communications on that I could hear him at all, though he was but two feet from me.

"Stop them, Captain," I shouted. "If we don't fire, it will pass us."

"No, Mr. Rogers. Hear this, men. The shot that fells the beast gets another ten percent of my share. Now, Mr. Rogers. Now I get my eye back, and the men of the Essex, and the right to bring the fruit of this Hell back to Earth. Now is the moment all mankind has waited for. Now. Will you deny me that? Will you, Mr. Rogers?"

I COULDN'T answer. It was too late. One of the emplacements had brought its weapon to bear and fired at what seemed point blank range. The sound was deafening above the roar of the wind. I felt the wind tear at my clothes and saw the blinding flash and then heard the sound of the detonation. Kingsford stood firm through all this. "Again," he shouted. "Again." Then he fell forward, the wind tearing at him. I fell to my knees then, the wind dragging at me, and felt a mound at my side. It was the base of a projection of stone. I undid my waist clasp and secured myself to the projection and reached out to Kingsford. I grasped his wrist and hung on as I saw the flame and smoke whirled away and sucked into the funnel of the monster as it turned toward the center of the camp. Kingsford was like a limp rag, dragging in the wind against my hand. The animal had veered directly toward the camp site. It was over the ship. It dwarfed the Algonquin, easily ten times its size. I saw solid objects floating toward its funnel mouth. I was deafened by the roar of the wind now, but I saw that the objects were men and equipment. I thought I heard screams, but it must have been the roaring of the wind. Then I saw both its eyes, huge yet blind, and everything about me rushing

toward the mouth of the funnel. Then the ship began to come apart and I could see nothing in the devastating clouds of dust and smoke that surrounded me, a solid mass fleeing at unbelievable speed toward a center I could no longer determine. Once, during this horror, I felt a weight lifted from the strain on my body. I did not realize at once that it was Kingsford being torn away from my grasp. After that, I gave myself up to what might be. I could no longer breathe, no longer see, no longer feel, but by some monstrous miracle, the stone projection to which I was clasped held securely and only in semi-consciousness was I aware of the gradual diminution of all sound and wind, and a slow returning to silence of this vast hell of a planet. Some time later, I opened my eyes to the magnificent glare of early morning sunlight in full splendor.

Nothing about me had remained. Of the men, the emplacements, the conveyors, refinery or reactor, indeed of the Algonquin herself I saw nothing more. Only a plain. A vast, arid plain, where once there had been forty some men and myself, a ship that mirrored the pinnacle of human technology, and the semblance of a habitable, arable land. I was alone.

I remember now that I forced

myself to stand. I remember that I walked for endless hours, searching but not finding the least sign of a crew, a ship, a life in which I was Executive Officer Philip Rogers. I remember I spoke one word over and over again as I walked, the word vanity, and I cried aloud to myself until I could think and walk and speak and cry no more. Then I fell to the ground and dug my way into a sleep of unconsciousness for I don't know how long. When I wakened, it was night, a night this time with the cool light of two moons casting a double shadow of my hand as I raised it for something that my eyes could see. I stood and walked again. I walked until the night began to fade and I was in a land of greens and warm forest shadows.

I HAVE grown to recognize every sign of the animals. When they come, a desert remains in their path. I must find another oasis. But things grow rapidly here. A desert is replaced by a pasture for their grazing in not too many weeks, or it may be months. I no longer count. Kingsford was wrong, of course. This was not his personification of evil. Nor had his monster grown in his absence. They are the sole specie of this place. After a time you grow to recognize the difference, and I have

never seen two the same size, or looking exactly alike. I learned to hide as I have learned to live on this planet. I live, but I wonder whether it can be called a life. I write about what happened, and I tell it to myself aloud. But I prepare no warning for others, for my every waking hour is devoted to the hope that no others will ever come. This is a planet which was never meant for man to discover. Of that, Captain

Kingsford was indisputably right.

("Here, the telling of the tale was interrupted. The time of hiding had come again. Philip Rogers retired to the place he had chosen in this forest and bound the clasps he had fashioned and listened for the wind to rise and the sounds that grew louder, and he thought, "This time. Perhaps this time. Yes, perhaps this time.")

THE END

BEFORE EDEN

(continued from page 46)

the element without which the spark of life could never ignite. It began to nuzzle the rocks, to ooze into the cracks and cran-nies, to scratch and scabble with probing tendrils. Nothing that it did was beyond the capacity of any plant or tree on Earth—but it moved a thousand times more quickly, requiring only minutes to reach its goal and pierce through the plastic film.

And then it feasted, on food more concentrated than any it had ever known. It absorbed the carbohydrates and the proteins and the phosphates, the nicotine from the cigarette ends, the cellulose from the paper cups and spoons. All these it broke down and assimilated into its strange body, without difficulty and without harm.

Likewise it absorbed a whole

microcosmos of living creatures—the bacteria and viruses which, upon an older planet, had evolved into a thousand deadly strains. Though only a very few could survive in this heat and this atmosphere, they were sufficient. As the carpet crawled back to the lake, it carried contagion to all its world.

Even as the Morning Star set course for her distant home, Venus was dying. The films and photographs and specimens that Hutchins was carrying in triumph were more precious even than he knew. They were the only record that would ever exist of Life's third attempt to gain a foothold in the Solar System.

Beneath the clouds of Venus, the story of Creation was ended.

THE END

AMAZING STORIES



ON Oct. 23, 1960, an event of special significance in the literary acceptance of science fiction occurred. A weekly book review program on a New York City radio station carried a half-hour panel discussion on a book on interstellar warfare by Robert A. Heinlein titled *Starship Troopers*. The panelists were all high school students and the moderator was a college professor.

Considering that mankind is about to enter what is romantically called "The Space Age," it seemed entirely in order that an

educational program, customarily devoted to discussions by teenagers of important or timely books, should appraise the world of the future, space exploration and exciting adventure; except those subjects weren't what the panelists were talking about.

A listener tuning in midway during the program might understandably have thought that the topic was "The Philosophy of Government." For the students were evaluating Heinlein's proposal, in his book, of the professional soldier as a basis for government. This idea, in turn, re-

volved around the premise that citizens should be made to earn the right to vote by serving their country for two years in the armed services. Some way would be found for everyone who volunteered to serve, no matter how disabled. Heinlein projected the thesis that since the armed forces taught by discipline that the individual should place the group above self, a citizen would tend to display that same selflessness in his voting decisions, to the betterment of all.

Beyond that, Heinlein urged that we dispense with romanticism and base our morality upon the fact that we are fundamentally "wild beasts" driven by the need for survival. The morality of the lion, by its very nature, must differ from that of sheep. It cannot be immoral for the lion to kill for food or he would starve.

Something new was happening here. For years, it was the vogue to show what the mainstream writers, who had worked in science fiction, had contributed to the art as it is practiced today. Now, a product of the science fiction pulp magazines, Robert A. Heinlein, by his unique talents, was influencing the thinking of the mainstream.

True, in this case it was on the teenage level; but a few years earlier, through his stories of

science fiction in THE SATURDAY EVENING POST and the motion picture based on one of his works, *Destination Moon*, he had demonstrated to adults that the themes of science fiction were their problems in a world only as far away as tomorrow.

Among the writers and devotees of science fiction, Heinlein frequently was envied and adulated for having scaled the top rung in ability and influence among writers of "modern" science fiction ("modern" being used as a term to designate those writers and methods in science fiction that had reached their greatest vogue since 1940). This same inner circle now presented a paradox. In dozens of sf fan magazines, and on the platforms of science fiction conventions, the controversy raged as to whether Heinlein's philosophy in *Starship Troopers* was "evil," valid or merely an author's device to spur reader interest. The majority seemed to regard the philosophy of *Starship Troopers* as Heinlein's personal belief. The majority also condemned it.

On the other hand, despite the furious disputes, science-fictioners joined ranks on the question of Heinlein's literary artistry. In a poll of readers for the best science fiction novel of 1959, *Starship Troopers* obtained a decisive plurality and its author, for the second time in his writ-

ing career, received the coveted "Hugo" (science fiction's version of Hollywood's "Oscar") at the 18th World Science Fiction Convention held in Sept., 1960. Four years earlier, at the 1956 convention, Robert Heinlein's novel *Double Star* also copped a Hugo.

But Heinlein, it must be remembered, has for 21 years held major status as a science fiction writer. His views were frequently berated, but as a major shaper of the direction of science fiction, he was also beloved. The two Hugos, in a very real sense, were given him, like the coveted Nobel Prize, in consideration of past as well as current performance. How did Heinlein become such a controversial personality?

ROBERT Anson Heinlein was born July 7, 1907, in Butler, Mo., the son of Rex Ivar Heinlein and Bam Lyle Heinlein. He was one of seven children. And there were distinct checks and balances on his ego as a result of the type of discipline that siblings impose on one another.

He graduated from the public schools of Kansas City, Mo., in 1924. A major if not pivotal influence on his thinking was his subsequent naval career. Heinlein graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1929, and served on aircraft carriers when they were still "science fiction" so far as proving themselves in

actual combat was concerned. A crack gunnery officer, he ignored a severe illness while on active duty in 1934 and ended the tour of duty with his health so undermined that he was retired that year as permanently disabled.

The second most important influence on Heinlein's writing was his continuous and generous reading of science fiction from his earliest days, starting with second-hand copies of FRANK READE WEEKLY, a "dime-novel" paper devoted to a young inventor similar to Tom Swift, as well as Tom Swift himself and everything purchasable from the stands from 1916 on. To a "classic" background in Wells, Verne, Haggard and Burroughs, he added regular purchase of ARGOSY-ALL STORY and Hugo Gernsback's ELECTRICAL EXPERIMENTER.

With the appearance of science fiction magazines he bought and read them all. He was literally saturated in the popular periodical background of American science fiction. This broad knowledge of his medium was later reflected in the familiarity with which he combined and refined the diverse and intricate themes of magazine science fiction into his own work.

Heinlein did not have to surmise when he struck a new chord in science fiction. He knew. Echoes of dozens of popular pulp science fiction writers sounded

in his work, but no single note called his direction. His role was to lead, not to follow.

The only mainstream writer to whom Heinlein acknowledges a debt is Sinclair Lewis, and it is not for literary style. Lewis laid out extensive backgrounds for his work which did not directly appear in the story. That way he understood how his characters should react in a given situation, being possessed of more information on them than the reader. In Heinlein, this ultimately grew beyond the bounds intended by Sinclair Lewis, whose characters performed against a setting that the reader knew. The Sinclair Lewis method couldn't work for science fiction unless an entire history of the future was projected; then, individual stories and characters in that series could at least be consistent with the framework of that never-never land.

In following just this procedure, Robert A. Heinlein inadvertently struck upon the formula that had proved so successful for Edgar Rice Burroughs, L. Frank Baum and, more recently, J. R. R. Tolkien. He created a reasonably consistent dream world and permitted the reader to enter it. Heinlein's *Future History* has, of course, a stronger scientific base than Burroughs' *Mars*, Baum's *Oz* or Tolkien's land of the "Rings."

But it is fundamentally the same device.

A retired naval officer at 27, disabled or not, Heinlein could not simply sit and vegetate, so he enrolled at U.C.L.A. graduate school in California to study mathematics and physics. His health failed again before he could complete his studies, but the time spent there gave him an insight into the sciences which were to give his literary work an added note of verisimilitude.

IN the next few years he tried his hand at many things; politics, real estate, architecture and mining; regardless of his personal success at any of them, elements of each seem reflected in his stories. We find Heinlein speaking with a note of authority on the nature of politics in "*If This Goes On . . .*"; the art of selling real estate and architecture both figure in "*. . . And He Built A Crooked House*"; only mining seems conspicuously absent from his works.

Personally, evidences of the politician, of the south-western cultured variety, still manifest themselves in the urbanity of Heinlein's manner and his diplomacy in choice of words.

John W. Campbell, Jr., editor of *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION*, used to say that the best way to get Heinlein writing was to in-

terest him in something that cost money. The year that Robert Heinlein first appeared as a professional writer was a depression year, 1939. He needed money to pay the mortgage on his home. Carefully nursing his delicate health, it was scarcely remarkable that he decided to investigate writing as a method of making money. As an unrepentant life-long reader of science fiction, it was a logical step for him to write in that vein."

In 1939 science fiction was booming. An expanding field was good for the beginning writer and editors were anxious to encourage them. Heinlein's first story, *LIFE LINE*, after an unsuccessful try at *COLLIERS*, was bought by *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION*. It would be nice to say that Heinlein "wowed" them from the first (just as Stanley G. Weimbaum exploded like a nova five years earlier with *A Martian Odyssey*) but it didn't happen that way. *Life Line*, though well written, was only on the borderline of acceptability. It was science-fiction only by courtesy. It concerned Dr. Hugo Pinero, who builds a machine that can tell how long a man will live. The machine functions on the premise that the future, present and past exist simultaneously; that time is a dimension and therefore one's duration in that dimension may be electrically

measured. The punch line comes with the realization that the inventor has calculated his own time of death and philosophically accepted it.

There were also a few reader distractions. The previous issue of *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION* had featured a new "find" named A. E. van Vogt with a dynamite first story that followed the one Heinlein appeared in titled *Black Destroyer*. The issue featured a decidedly adroit first story, *Ether Breather*, by another capable young man named Theodore Sturgeon.

The competition wasn't asleep either. Around the same time other magazines published the first stories of Alfred Bester and Isaac Asimov.

Misfit, Heinlein's second published story in the November, 1939, *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION*, has been given short shrift by reviewers as a minor effort imperfectly told. This is true so far as its intrinsic merit is concerned, but with the advantage of hindsight it can be seen as of paramount importance as a precursor of Heinlein's method. The plot concerns a group of maladjusted boys who are taken to an asteroid by the government for reorientation. Among them is a youth from the Ozarks who develops into a mathematical genius, capable of matching an elec-

tronic computer without pen or paper. The boy, oddly named Andrew Jackson Libby, saves the ship when the calculator fails and he accurately functions in its stead.

Misfit is Heinlein's first juvenile. It fits the pattern of the juveniles of Heinlein's post-World War II writing career. There is the teenage hero, the firm but fundamentally benevolent military, an elementary skeleton of a plot (misfit boy proves himself) set against a casually detailed background developed as though it could happen today. The gifted boy later becomes an important factor in Heinlein's novel *Methuselah's Children*, helping to perfect a near-the-speed-of-light drive for a star ship.

HEINLEIN came into his own after a very brief apprenticeship with the short story *Requiem* in the Jan., 1940 *ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION*. D. D. Harriman, hero of that story, is an old man with a bad heart, whose drive, ingenuity and capital made the first manned space flight to the moon possible. He can never go to the moon himself, because the acceleration and other rigors of space travel will kill him. Nevertheless, he convinces two hard-up spacemen to take him. Evading all attempts by associates and government

officials to stop him, he survives the trip and lives long enough to actually touch the moon's surface.

Here the student of writing techniques becomes aware of the calibre of Heinlein's craftsmanship. The phrase "art that conceals art" applies pointedly to *Requiem*, as it does to a large number of Heinlein's stories. The reader is not aware that there is a "style." Everything is subordinated to the story which is carried along almost invisibly by clear prose, natural dialogue and a careful integration of detail concerning the times, society and past of the characters that never disturbs the flow of the narrative. This extraordinary talent is at once Heinlein's triumph and sorrow. It can achieve memorable poignancy as in the case of *Requiem*, yet no one ever refers to his prose as poetic, because the details are incorporated with such cool efficiency that few realize the author has sacrificed the aesthetics of the individual passage to achieve the unified poetry of the whole.

Requiem is unusual in still another respect. It is a sequel to a longer story that was not written until 10 years later! The trials and tribulations of Harriman in financing and launching the first moon rocket, referred to in *Requiem*, are delineated in 30,000 excellent words in *The*

Man Who Sold The Moon, the title story in the first hard-cover collection of Heinlein's Future History series published by Shasta Publishers, in 1950.

In the issue in which *Requiem* was published, editor Campbell went quietly mad about two novels that were forthcoming. The first was by Heinlein, titled "*If This Goes On . . .*" The second was "Final Blackout," by the brilliant pulpster, L. Ron Hubbard, who would disappear from the ranks of science fiction some years later to further his dual creations of Dianetics and Scientology. The latter was distinctly the better of the two, powerfully written, prophetically warning, with the lead character magnificently drawn. Yet, Heinlein's effort was destined to have the more far-reaching effect on the pattern of future science fiction.

"*If This Goes On . . .*" underlined Campbell's new policy of stressing the sociological implications of the changes of the future in preference to advances in technology. It was a return to the old "Utopias" with the difference that this was a "warning" story, a "Utopia in reverse" or "Misutopia."

The patterns of thought-shaping, television spying and studied psychological and physical torture to keep the masses in line and maintain power, all pre-

cede George Orwell's 1984, published nine years later. Not that Heinlein originated the theory of the methods; but there certainly is something to be said for the writer capable of bringing inadequately considered areas of thought under the scrutiny of the reader.

Most important, "*If This Goes On . . .*" showed one method whereby a state-imposed religion could effectively play a role in the future as a cover for tyranny. Magazine science fiction had stayed clear of theocracy but that policy was now to end, opening a rich field of exploration which helped create at least two reputations: Fritz Leiber, Jr.'s, upon the appearance of *Gather, Darkness* (1943), a novel of dictatorship sustained by the scientifically produced "miracles" of a false religion; and Walter M. Miller, Jr.'s, *A Canticle For Leibowitz*, a masterful effort sympathetically portraying how religion revived learning and civilization after atomic catastrophe.

HEINLEIN'S convincingness in many of his works was due to his use of the technique of "taking the future for granted." The characters were familiar with the world they lived in and behaved accordingly; but through their conversation, actions and the story's setting, the

reader was adroitly filled in on the details, which frequently were more fascinating than the plot. This eliminated the need for the all-too-common device of bringing a man of the past into the future or somehow getting a message back to today's world.

It was *The Roads Must Roll* that convinced readers of ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION for June, 1940, that Heinlein had arrived as an important new writer. Moving roads and walkways had been common fare in science fiction since Jules Verne, but Heinlein was the first to devote an entire story to a nation whose economy was geared to this form of transportation. The plot is simple and unimportant: what happens when the mechanics who operate these conveyor-belt roads strike. The picture outlined by Heinlein of the character of the civilization that would result from this type of transportation is ingeniously constructed.

But not everything Heinlein was writing at the time struck a responsive chord. *Let There Be Light*, probably rejected by ASTOUNDING, found a home in a new magazine, SUPER SCIENCE STORIES for May, 1940, edited by a man later to make his own reputation as a writer, Frederik Pohl. Because he couldn't pay top rates, the story appeared under the pen name of Lyle Monroe, the "Lyle" being the maiden

name of Heinlein's mother. The plot deals with an inventor who discovers a new source of power and is blocked from marketing it by big power interests. He defeats them by making his secret available to the entire world at no charge. It was a fairish sort of story, but aroused a predominantly unfavorable reader reaction because the attempt at naturalism through the use of slang, colloquialisms and sex implications was misinterpreted.

With the publicity attending "*If This Goes On . . .*", a sequel was not long in coming. *Coventry* appeared in ASTOUNDING for July, 1940, and dealt with the period after the Second American Revolution, when a special area, surrounded by an impassable electronic barrier, was set up for people who did not conform to the current society. They had absolute "freedom" as long as they stayed there and could leave at any time they decided they didn't like it. The story shed new light on Heinlein's own thinking.

Once again we have the recurrent motif of the misfit, a major or minor plot device in a substantial portion of Heinlein's work. Not only is Heinlein obsessed with misfits, but in a surprising number of cases these characters are inherently noble and have a major contribution to make society. Frequently they are far superior to normal man.

In *Misfit*, the youth taken for reorientation is a mathematical genius; the malcontents of "*If This Goes On . . .*" are the revolutionaries who will restore freedom to America; rebellious Venusian workers in *Logic Of Empire* form a community in every way more desirable than the rest of the planet; outcast "Muties" in *Universe*, despite their grotesqueness, possess the clarity of mind to lead man to the promised land; in *Methuselah's Children* persecuted "Families" are a race of inherently longlived humans; *Waldo's* protagonist must live apart from the human race, subsisting on brilliant invention; Thorby, a slave boy in *Citizen of the Galaxy*, develops to be heir of a great family business empire; and in many of Heinlein's juveniles we find emigrant families from earth, who can't make it on the home planet, ending up as courageous and fulfilled pioneers.

A VERY definite link to Heinlein's thinking is provided by Fader, a prime "misfit in *Coventry*, who really is a disguised military officer on a mission. Forced to sever active duty with the armed services, Heinlein himself, remember, tried a variety of occupations, none of them permanent until he became a writer. A man with his sensitivity must have felt like a right

hand being forced into a left-hand glove. Unable to use his military training effectively, it was easy for him to develop an empathy for others he met who were floundering or miscast.

Moreover, a large percentage of Heinlein's misfits are eventually integrated into society, often through the aid of the military or through the adoption of military-like philosophies. Somehow, Heinlein has overlooked the fact that successful authors are not misfits in modern society. They may be different but they *are* accepted, frequently in a sickeningly lavish fashion. He is still not aware that he no longer needs vicariously to justify himself.

Heinlein's *Blowups Happen*, a novelet built around the tension of operating an atomic energy plant, seems more grimly prophetic in hindsight than it actually was when it appeared in *ASTOUNDING* for Sept., 1940, considering that Campbell had been editorially pounding away at the proximity of atomic energy since 1938. Nevertheless, the story was effective when published, despite the conclusion that no atomic energy plant could safely be operated on the earth's surface and the future would find it necessary to throw them into orbit as earth satellites. (This belief is said to have been held by Campbell during the period the story was published, and it is quite

possible it may have been a compromise to satisfy him.) More positively, *Blowups Happen* was a model for possibly the best story of that type written to date—*Nerves* by Lester Del Rey, which initially appeared in ASTOUNDING for Sept., 1942.

Meanwhile as a result of the new popularity of science fiction and fantasy, Street and Smith had issued a companion to ASTOUNDING titled UNKNOWN. Stories in UNKNOWN were fairy tales for grownups. Old myths, legends and superstitions were utilized as the background for tales told in a modern manner with today's attitudes and slang, along with a sampling of stories that were too fantastically off-trail to appear anywhere else. Heinlein tried his hand at a bit of good-natured buffoonery titled *The Devil Makes The Law*, about an America where spells and incantations are part of everyday business, for the Sept., 1940, UNKNOWN; but despite a straight-faced effort it didn't quite come off.

Heinlein was so prolific now that it was essential he adopt a pen name in order to be able to run more than one story of his in an issue of ASTOUNDING. Editor Campbell, of Scotch descent, had a deep pride in his blood line. Two of his own pen names were Don A. Stuart and Arthur McCann. Because of this predilec-

tion, Campbell took Heinlein's middle name "Anson" and made him a member of the clan as Anson MacDonald.

THE first story under that name, a novel titled *Sixth Column*, ran for three installments beginning in the Jan., 1941, issue. The plot outline was originally the basis of an unpublished novelet of Campbell's, and dealt with an America conquered by Orientals, with a new religion as a front for a revolutionary movement. The foundation of the United States' hopes is the invention of a device which can be set to discriminatingly kill Orientals while leaving other races untouched. The appearance of a scientifically induced 1000-foot tall high black giant, dressed in the robes of the priesthood, is reminiscent of Campbell's *Cloak of Aeser*. Again, as in a large number of Heinlein stories, it is the military man who saves the day. Whatever Heinlein's other early impressions, his years as an officer in the navy must have been most pleasant and psychologically rewarding, for he looks back at them with a reverence and nostalgia akin to religion.

The prose of *Sixth Column* was immaculate, and the story well paced. The Anson MacDonald pen name was one of the poorest-kept secrets in science fiction. Too many people knew it.

Yet, among the general readers, it must have understandably seemed that an important new talent had appeared on the science fiction horizon.

Outside the one month's temporary employment, Heinlein was now devoting full time to science fiction writing, and there was no question that he had hit his stride. ". . . *And He Built A Crooked House*," published in *ASTOUNDING* for Feb., 1941, was a delightful fantasy and the first of his works to be anthologized (*The Pocket Book of Science Fiction*, 1932). An eight-sided house built in the form of a tesseract is shaken up in a California earthquake and its prospective buyers find that it has cut catty-corner across the fourth dimension. Each side looks out on a different landscape and investigation of the paradox was memorable enough to inspire Harry Walton to try to solve a post-war problem that way in *Housing Shortage* (*ASTOUNDING*, Jan., 1947), a classic in its own right.

Logic of Empire (*ASTOUNDING*, Mar., 1941) was an extremely well-done exposition on the possibility of a form of slavery reappearing in colonizing the planets (this theme is dealt with in considerable more detail in *Citizen of the Galaxy*, 1957). Here, a Heinlein weakness for hastily tying up the endings of his sto-

ries is particularly apparent. It is as though the exploration of the idea is all that interests him, and its culmination proves a burdensome chore to be dispensed with as expediently as possible. With this story a footnote appeared to the effect that Heinlein's "stories are based on a common proposed history of the world, with emphasis on the history of America."

Readers were enthralled by an editorial, *History To Come*, in the May, 1941 *ASTOUNDING*, calling attention to a two-page chart outlining Heinlein's Future History from 1940 to 2140, with published as well as proposed stories fitted into the framework. Interest in his work mounted tremendously as a result, aided by the appearance of one of his most inspired efforts, *Universe*, in the same issue. The central idea of this story—mammoth ship, a small world in itself, traveling towards the stars in a voyage that will take centuries—was first successfully used by Laurence Manning in *The Living Galaxy* (*WONDER STORIES*, 1934). But it was Heinlein whose example started a trend. His exposition of a human "crew" who had forgotten, through the centuries of traveling, the original purpose of their journey; of the formation of a religion to explain their strange, limited "universe," was brilliant. A revolt

and division of the ship into two camps, one largely composed of bizarre mutations as the result of radiation, offers elements of conflict: Excellent action and characterization set against one of the most unusual backgrounds in the history of science fiction up to that time made the story a classic, and the ancestor of many other outstanding efforts of that type including *Far Centaurus* by A. E. van Vogt, *The Voyage That Lasted 600 Years* by Don Wilcox, *One in Three Thousand* by J. T. McIntosh, and *Space-bred Generations* by Clifford D. Simak. :

The same issue had Anson MacDonald with *Solution Unsatisfactory*, which, though now dated, was Heinlein's most prophetic effort. In it he predicted, before the entry of the United States in the war, that we would develop atomic energy and produce a weapon from which there was "no place to hide." Heinlein envisioned radioactive dust, rather than a bomb, and was unable to offer any satisfactory solution for policing the discovery. Hence the title.

HEINLEIN began to gather the threads of his future history together in one of the unifying "masterworks" of the series, *Methuselah's Children*, a three-part novel which began in ASTOUNDING for July, 1941. The

powerful opening chapter is indebted to A. E. van Vogt's *Slan*, an epic published less than a year previously, concerning the persecution of a mind-reading race of supermen called "slans" by normal humans. In *Methuselah's Children*, there are a widening group of "families" that have been inbreeding with individuals of exceptionally long life-span until heredity has greatly increased their life expectancy. When the normal humans find out about this part of the population a tremendous wave of persecution proceeds, aimed at extracting the "secret."

To save themselves, the "families" hi-jack an interstellar ship and start out on their own journey to the stars. Landing on a world of about earth's level of development, they leave in haste when they discover the "gods" these people worship are the true owners of the planet, and far beyond the earthmen in mental power. The story almost becomes fantasy when they alight on a second world, whose friendly inhabitants can by thought impulses change the fruit of trees to taste like steak and potatoes, or to an ice cream soda, or to whatever the earthmen prefer. The protagonists leave to return to earth when they find these creatures have a community mind that some of their party are joining! References to char-

acters met in previous Heinlein stories are frequent, and the effect is like a joyous old home week with the abundance of ideas combining into an intoxicating "sense-of-wonder" party.

To many, Heinlein achieved the pinnacle in the Oct., 1941, issue of *ASTOUNDING* featuring *By His Bootstraps*. Without question this is one of the greatest time-travel paradox stories of all time. A man comes back from the future to meet himself, fights himself, while himself stands by and watches. The effect is like examining a Moebius strip or a Klein bottle from the other side. Of course the story is a trick; but it virtually takes mathematics to disprove it, and Heinlein doesn't forget to tell a good tale in the process.

It was enough. Heinlein had made his point. Nineteen months after the appearance of his first story in Aug., 1939, a nationwide poll of science fiction fans rated Robert A. Heinlein as the most popular author!

Nine months earlier—in July, 1941—almost as if in rehearsal for the event, Heinlein had been guest of honor of the Third Annual World Science Fiction Convention in Denver, Colo. He said then: "I think that science fiction, even the corniest of it, even the most outlandish of it, no matter how badly it's written, has a distinct therapeutic value be-

cause *all* of it has as its primary postulate that the world *does* change."

A DYED-IN-THE-WOOL military man, Heinlein found a way to serve his country after Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941. As a mechanical engineer he put in long hours on highly secret radar and anti-kamikaze device. When he entered the service, science fiction lost three major authors: Robert A. Heinlein, Anson MacDonald and Lyle Monroe. Two other pseudonyms, Caleb Saunders and John Riverside, had published a single story apiece when the call came.

The most heralded "last" story of this first phase of Heinlein's writing was *Waldo*, which appeared under the MacDonald name in *ASTOUNDING* for Aug., 1942. Depicted on the cover was a remote-control device for manually handling objects, since built and utilized for manipulating radio-active materials in atomic energy plants and which actually are called "waldoes" in acknowledgement of the story that conceived them. This precise scientific prediction was one of a number in a wildly imaginative story with two precious characters: Waldo, a fat boy, born with a muscular weakness that made it possible for him to function properly only in the weightlessness of an earth satellite, and

who is forced for his own survival to become a supreme mechanical genius; and the ancient Amish-Country hex doctor, Schneider, who seems to be able to make metaphysics work under certain circumstances.

For almost a year after the end of World War II nothing appeared by Robert A. Heinlein. Then with the unexpectedness of a thunderclap, *The Green Hills Of Earth*, a story in the "Future History" series appeared in THE SATURDAY EVENING POST. It was followed by *Space Jockey*, *It's Great To Be Back* and *The Black Pits of Luna*. With the exception of *It's Great To Be Back*, a minor masterpiece in the adjustment of long-term residents on the moon to the heavier gravitational pull of the earth, they were virtually school-book primer science fiction in flawless slick prose. No one realized it at the time, but a unique thing had happened. The science fiction magazines had sent a missionary to the masses. Their top writer, Robert A. Heinlein, had unwittingly begun to educate the general public to science fiction, beginning with its most elementary forms.

Because of his popularity in the science fiction field, and his surehanded success with a wider audience, Heinlein became the most imitated figure in science fiction. Authors by the dozen

copied his matter-of-fact style, placing major emphasis on the turn of the phrase. They seemed unaware of the flavor and substance contained in the background of Heinlein's stories. They were unable or unwilling to duplicate it. Heinlein was casual, but he did not lack a sense of wonder. He was merely more sophisticated about the manner in which he introduced it. His readers were not cheated of the one thing that science fiction has to sell. What effectiveness would *The Roads Must Roll* have had without the carefully constructed picture of a society dependent on conveyors?

This "sense of wonder" was defined by Rollo May in his book, *Man's Search For Himself*: "Wonder is the opposite of cynicism and boredom; it indicates that a person has a heightened aliveness, is interested, expectant, responsive. It is essentially an 'opening' attitude . . . an awareness that there is more to life than one has yet fathomed, an experience of new vistas in life to be explored as well as new profundities to be plumbed."

The newcomers and the imitators trying to emulate Heinlein misinterpreted style for substance, sliding their papier-maché characters down well-grooved situations, past improvised props, for an overall effect as unreal as a puppet show. There

were a great many of these imitators and they crowded the pages of the magazines. One by one they—and the magazines—disappeared.

Heinlein's legacy to his own field was therefore tragic. Through no fault of his own, he

played the role of a literary Pied Piper in the decline of science fiction that continued through the decade of the 1950's. One of his stories, published in 1941, was called *Lost Legions*. It should have been dedicated to his imitators.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

Big news in the July AMAZING! A new novel—by Murray Leinster—Complete in one issue. Titled *Pariah Planet*, it is another exciting tale of the Galactic Medical Service, and a planet with a strange plague.

Gordon Dickson writes a powerful novelet of danger and self-sacrifice on the Moon in *Whatever Gods There Be*, the story illustrated by the powerful Nuetzell cover (r.).

In addition to short stories there will be the second in the series of **Frank Tinsley's** fact features. This one details the structure and function of a cosmic lifeboat. Also scheduled for July is another Classic Reprint—**G. Peyton Wertenbaker's** famed *The Coming of the Ice*, which first appeared in 1926.



PLUS all our regular features. Be sure to reserve your copy of the July AMAZING, on sale at your newsstand June 8.

the Planet of Shame

(conclusion)

By BRUCE ELLIOTT

Illustrated by FINLAY

SYNOPSIS

THIRTY men and thirty women have been marooned on New Australia the only pleasant planet in Alpha Centauri. Their sin is that they are the last "inner-directed" group left in an "outer-directed" world.

A thousand years and more have gone by since the sixty were originally left to make their home so many light years from earth. From being "inner-directed" they have reverted to being "ancestor-directed."

Their world is set up pyramidally. The broad base is as always, the people. Above them are the Elders, the Fathers (who are protected at all times by the Fathers' Right Arms; the R.A.'s have halos and stun guns). Above the Fathers there is one stern and ultimate authority, The Grandfather.

THE CHARACTERS:

James Comstock 101, is the ultimate unwilling hero.

Danny Grundy 112, befriends our hero during a drunken aber-





rant moment and sets the wheels of the plot in motion.

Tony Bowdler 131, is seemingly the master mind behind a plot to overthrow the Grandfather.

Jimmy Comstock at thirty-five, although admittedly still a baby has been told the facts of life by his Father. This has meant that for the first time in his life it has become obligatory to go to a w...house once a month and there enjoy the dubious delights of sex.

On one of these monthly visits he has a heart attack. The only known cure for angina pectoris in his world is for him to become a drunkard.

This has meant that he is forced to spend time in a saloon which at first he finds horrendously distasteful. But it is on a trip to cure his angina pectoris by getting drunk that he meets two jolly drinking companions, Grundy and Bowdler.

They begin to open his eyes to the fact that the world, his world, may not really be set up the way he thinks it is. For instance, Bowdler and Grundy ask him, why does he think he has been conditioned to find only aged women attractive? Why has he been conditioned to find young, juicy girls disgusting?

Is it perhaps because the "Fathers" are really the Fathers of this whole world's population?

The thought is a stunning one and brings other thoughts in its train leading to the ultimate blasphemy; Comstock begins to wonder if the Grandfather is in truth all knowing and all wise.

While his world is whirling about his head, as he thinks these dangerous thoughts, an R.A. spots the cabal of Comstock, Grundy and Bowdler and Bowdler is stun-gunned to death.

Comstock and Grundy make their escape to Grundy's girl's house. The girl named Helen, is young and attractive. She causes even more dangerous thoughts to begin to occupy Comstock's mind.

Comstock, Grundy and Helen are captured by a group of R.A.'s and taken to the Grandfather's Retreat.

Everything Comstock has ever thought, has ever been taught has been turned upside-down. He is fearful, yet grateful for the chance to be thinking a little more clearly than he ever has before.

But now in the dread Retreat surrounded by Elders, Fathers, and continuously aware of the fact that someplace in the building the Grandfather actually lives, Comstock's heroism, weak at best, swirls up and down; his cowardice and bravery are mixed and whipped into a broth as he and his two friends sit outside

the Father's room waiting to be judged.

The door of the Fathers' room opens and the dead man, Tony Bowdler strolls through it, truly alive.

Comstock's mind reels even more as Bowdler reveals that he is a Father, that he has forced the R.A. who supposedly killed him to lie about his death and that he, Bowdler is still on their side.

He arranges for Comstock, Grundy and Helen to escape from the Retreat. This is managed by overcoming an R.A. and by Comstock donning the dread costume of a Right Arm . . .

It has also meant that he has had to change clothes in front of Helen which at any other time would have been enough to make him die of embarrassment.

He realizes suddenly that despite all the alarms and excursions he has been living through, that he has lived through them . . .

That is, his bad heart has not caused a heart attack. Is it possible he does not have angina pectoris? If he doesn't then why would the doctor have lied to him?

Comstock and Grundy and Helen escape from the Retreat into a vehicle none of them have ever seen before called an "auto."

In this strange, noisy machine

they careen through the streets and finally after some misadventures they arrive where they have been told to go by Bowdler . . . to his house.

Two things concern them . . . they have passed no human being on the streets . . . and, despite the fact that Bowdler has seemed to be their friend, they are now, for the first time to enter a house that actually belongs to a Father . . .

The thought is horrifying . . .

All three of them walk towards the door hesitantly; it opens by itself.

From within the house a heavy metallic voice says, "Welcome may you be . . ."

Once inside Bowdler's house they are further amazed to find bookcases from floor to ceiling filled with thousands of books on sociology, history, psychology, anthropology—subjects that Comstock never knew existed. In his entire life his reading matter had consisted of ten or fifteen books, all simple Father Goose poems.

The discovery of the books is second only to the realization of the way the house is prepared to take care of its guests. Machines are geared to service every whim. Following their initial adjustment to the situation, their attention is recalled to the fact that

they had not seen a single soul near the house as they approached it, nor had there been anyone on the streets even at a fair distance from the house.

Left to themselves, they settle back impatiently to wait for Bowdler. Comstock's waking moments are filled with reading and more reading. He is also plagued with a growing uneasiness as he finds Helen becoming more desirable. Though he would like to woo her away from Grundy, he never has enough courage to go through with it. Failing in this aspiration, he hopes somehow to find a young and beautiful girl for himself.

As time goes on and there is no sign of Bowdler, they begin to think that something has happened to him. Finally exactly a month after their arrival, Bowdler arrives. He explains that there is a force field around the house which accounts for their complete isolation. He also tells them that since their last meeting he has discovered another rebel, a girl, who is to join their ranks. She should already be at the house. Since she is not, Bowdler's plans for her escape must have failed and she has probably been captured by the R.A.'s. Bowdler is about to turn the force field back on, thereby automatically sacrificing the girl. Comstock protests and, sur-

prising even himself, volunteers to go after her.

Spurred on by Bowdler's description of the young beauty, Comstock leaves the enchanted house and steps out into the familiar and menacing world.

CHAPTER 9

A WAVE of revulsion turned Comstock's stomach making him forget, for a moment, the girl for whom he was seeking. All around him in eddying mobs were elderly, grey and white haired women, their long dresses dragging on the ground. The idea that he had ever found them exciting was hard for him to bear. And the way the young men held the women's arms, talked to them, guided and protected them, made Comstock feel even queazier.

It was a Grandfather's Meeting night and all the couples were on their way to the meeting house. Above them all, the crazily careening green moon sent down harsh high lights that made the old women seem even more decrepit than they really were.

But search as Comstock would, of the red-haired girl he found no sign.

It was getting later and he saw an R.A.'s carriage come down the street, its astrobat dancing as the R.A. driver

lashed them. He called out, "Nine o'clock, time for meeting!"

Knowing that he would be arrested if he stayed out on the street while everyone else went into the meeting house, Comstock decided he had better try to look like a normal citizen. Even so, however, he was the recipient of an icy stare from the R.A. For he was the last person to enter the meeting place.

Comstock's flesh crawled when he found the last empty hard seat, and sat listening to the only too familiar smooth patter of the Elder who stood in the front of the hall, on a little podium and mouthed the old, only too familiar platitudes, about The Grandfather.

Closing his eyes, Comstock tried unavailingly to close his ears to the now meaningless words that flooded him and all the others in the crowded smelly meeting place.

The Elder was speaking, his seamed face hanging in lank folds, his jowls wobbling as they barked out the words, "And so, we know now that only in the lap of The Grandfather is there to be found the peace that passes all understanding . . ."

Comstock's eyes blinked open in shock when a clear, sweet voice interrupted the maunderings of the Elder by saying, "Poppycock!"

The Elder's face froze in ludicrous astonishment as he repeated after his heckler, "Poppycock?"

And then he saw her, Comstock did, and he was glad he hadn't murdered Grundy, and he was even gladder that his frozen tongue had not been able to utter words of love he had wanted to say to Helen. For he saw the girl for whom he had been searching and she was all his maddest dreams come true.

SHE stood up on her chair at one side of the hall and her eyes were as clear as Bowdler had said, and now they were flashing in anger. Her chest was heaving with indignation and Comstock found himself admiring the way her chest lent itself to this sort of treatment.

Waving one hand in the air for attention, she said, "You fools! How much longer are you going to be duped by the maunderings of these old fools? Don't you know that it's all a lie?"

The audience rose in its wrath and with one voice roared loudly enough to drown out all sounds that might have come from the girl.

The Elder, pointing a shaking arthritic forefinger at the girl, said in a feeble voice that didn't reach through the tumult. "She is insane. Call the R.A.'s."

But the crowd was too upset

for any such normal proceedings. None of Comstock's reading had covered lynchings but that was the feeling that emanated from the furious people. This was a many-headed mob that wanted blood.

She was grabbed by so many hands that Comstock wondered if anything would be left of her. One man, bigger and stronger than the rest of the crowd roared out, "To the stocks with her!"

There was no way that Comstock could fight his way to her side, and even if he could have there was little he could have done but he attacked in his turn.

"The stocks," he kept thinking. They were outside in the square, just to one side of a statue of The Grandfather, where the graven image could look down in its infinite wisdom and be soothed and assuaged by the sight of its recalcitrant grandchildren being punished in the stocks.

If he waited, Comstock thought, till she was in them, there would be little he could do, for few ever lived through more than an hour of that treatment. The rocks and stones thrown by the good, lawful citizens of the community made sure of that.

No he could not wait, and yet what could he do as of that moment? What had possessed her to make her speak out in the meeting? The little fool. He'd

shake some of the nonsense out of her, if he ever got her away from those menacing hands.

The crowd surged out of the meeting house, down the stairs and toward the statue. There was still no sign of any R.A. But then, why should there have been? Once everyone was at meeting, the R.A.'s could relax, having done their duty for the evening.

But how long could the rumble, the frightening mutter of an outraged mob continue before some R.A. heard it?

Comstock came to a sudden decision, as a ferocious and even more elderly woman than most reached forward and ripped the girl's dress from her neck to her navel, screeching, "The hussy! Put her in the stocks! I've got a stone for her! A big one . . . perhaps one of you young sirs would help me throw it?" She looked about her coquettishly and her plea did not fall on empty air.

Running around the outer perimeter of the mob, Comstock made his way to the statue of the kindly-faced Grandfather. Skirting the stocks which were ugly and dull with the blood that had so many times defaced them, Comstock reached up and pulled himself into the lap of the stone Grandfather.

From that point of vantage he yelled, "Stop!"

His voice squeaked a little of course and did not come out with quite the roar that he had wanted it to, but it was enough, it served to halt the mob in its tracks.

Down below him, the girl, naked to the waist, her torn gown hanging from the belt that was all that retained the shreds of cloth that remained from the old woman's tearing hands, looked up at him.

The sight of her bare b s was almost too much for Comstock. It unmanned him momentarily, but raising his eyes to her face, and seeing the courage that shone from her eyes, he recovered his lost voice and this time it came out with a roar, as ye yelled, "Sanctuary! I claim the right of sanctuary for this girl and myself!"

IT had been over four hundred years since last a human voice had claimed that right. But in an ancestor directed culture like his, Comstock was sure that since old things were automatically the best things, his plea would have to be honored. Once having claimed sanctuary and while in the lap of the Grandfather, no one, not even the R.A. would tear you from that sacred place.

The mob was not at all happy, but it surrendered as he had been sure it would. The girl was

passed up to him. His hands reaching down for her, were gladdened by the soft silkiness of her skin as he pulled her to him. Once she too was seated next to him in that broad capacious lap, the first thing she did, and he was sorry to see it happen, was to pull the shreds of her garment close around her.

Down below them the crowd was not silent. It looked up, and after a while its many faces merged into one, a fearful, frightening visage with one big voice that chanted, "You have sanctuary. We cannot deny you that. But sooner or later you must leave for you must eat and drink . . . and when you do . . ."

And when they did, Comstock knew, they'd be torn to shreds. For the anger which formerly had been noisy and quarrelsome, was now quiet and, if anything, even more menacing than the noise had been.

But it would be a long time before he and the girl were forced to leave their sanctuary, and looking at her face, he decided that if he had to die, there were worse ways to go.

Shyly he put his hand out and stroked her flaming hair. Then he asked, "What's your name?"

"Patience and Fortitude Mather." She was still busy trying to arrange her torn clothing.

He gulped.

Noticing his surprise, she said, "But just call me Pat. What's your name?" But before he could answer she said, "Don't tell me you're a friend of . . ."

Nodding, he said, "Yes, I'm one of Bowdler's rebels." Then he identified himself.

"I should have known."

"Why," he asked with some asperity, "didn't you join us at Bowdler's house?"

"I couldn't shake off the R.A. who was following me and I wouldn't jeopardize the sanctum."

"Of course. But what made you decide to get up and carry on the way you did at the meeting?"

"When I finally did get away from the R.A. it was too late. It was past the time that Bowdler said I would be able to get through the force field. I knew I was lost and I decided I might just as well go down to defeat saying the things I'd always wanted to say."

"In case," Comstock said, "just in case, there is any chance of an escape from our present situation, and we should become separated," and he told her about the two times of the day when it would be possible to get to Bowdler's house.

THE temperature went down as they sat on the cold stone and became acquainted. S-x was the farthest thing from Com-

stock's mind when he moved closer to the girl and held her in his arms to try and preserve their mutual body heat. At least s-x was far from his mind in the beginning of the long night. But as the evening hours wore away and the insane moon moved higher and higher in the sky, he found that hunger and thirst, cold and fear were not enough to keep certain thoughts from his now over-heated brain. Just sitting so close to her was the most exciting experience he had ever had.

Below them the Hydra-head of the angry multitude began to murmur as he disregarded some of the conventions on which he had been raised. "Shameful," "Disgusting," "Perverved," "Horrible," were some of the milder epithets that were thrown through the air.

Her skin he found on investigation put any flower he had ever beheld to shame. Her breath was sweet on his nostrils. The feel of her was unlike any thing he had ever dreamt of.

He said, his voice as low as his intentions, "Pat, do you think what I feel for you is love?"

Snuggling closer to him, she answered, "If it isn't, it's as good an imitation as we're likely to find." Then her inquisitive lips met his.

It was, he thought, even as he was experiencing it, a highly un-

likely place in which to enjoy a honeymoon.

The shamelessness of their conduct was not lost on the waiting throng. At one point even the R.A. who had joined the mob and whose hand had never left the butt of his stun-gun, found it necessary to walk away. None of the onlookers, as a matter of fact, could bear to watch.

So it was, that when Comstock accomplished his desire, and leaning back against The Grandfather's stony beard expressed some of his satisfaction by wishing he could fight the Board of Fathers, en masse, with one hand tied behind his back, he and Pat found that of the whole mob there was not a remnant.

Their conduct had shamed and frightened away the crowd.

Slipping down from the statue's lap, unable to believe their eyes, they skittered away in the now all-encompassing darkness, expecting at any moment to be halted by an R.A. or grabbed by some die-hards from the waiting crowd.

Jogging along at his beloved's side at a half-run, half-walk, Comstock wondered if even death could eradicate the exultation which he felt. But feeling as he did was not conducive, he found, to gloomy, dismal thoughts.

Not even when they ducked down a long alleyway, which he

thought led in the general direction of Bowdler's house, did he really, deeply feel concerned about capture. Life could not be so unfair, he decided, as to raise him up to such heights as he had just surmounted, and then drop him into a gloomy pit.

But of course life could, and did, do just that.

CHAPTER 10

HE could not help wonder as they ran through the alleyway towards a lighted area that might or might not lead to Bowdler's house, just how long the shock of what he had just done would keep the irate citizens off his trail. Pat ran at his side, her long legs easily keeping stride with him. If she was concerned about her own safety it did not show in her expression which was calm, and almost contemplative, if you disregarded the little quirk of a smile that turned up the ends of her full lips.

Despite the anxiety of his position, Comstock could not help but compare the feeling of ebullience and general physical well-being that surged through him, with the sadness and the feeling of despondency that he had always experienced after his monthly visits to the b. . . . l.

If he had not been so busy running and praying that they

could avoid the R.A.'s, he would like to have sat down and tried to reason out just what was the underlying reason for this change in his attitude towards sex, and its aftermath.

The pounding of their feet was the only sound in the silent night. Beside them the grey brick walls that lined the alley through which they ran were completely featureless. No windows or doors broke the long straight lines that reared up around them.

Pat paused and said, "Why are we running? It's quite clear that we . . ." she giggled, "scared everyone away with our outrageous conduct."

The fact that she was able to muster up a smile under these dire circumstances made a warm feeling well up in Comstock's chest. He feebly returned the smile, and then putting out his arms took her in them. He kissed her chastely on the lips and found that even this modest gesture made his temples pound.

Enfolding her and drawing her closer to him, he leaned his back against the nearest wall and whispered into her ear some of the phrases he had stored up from his reading which he had meant to say to Grundy's girl, Helen.

Their bodies were glued so tightly together that when the sound came, their start of sur-

prise was completely mutual. "Ssssst." It sibilated. And then again, "Sssst!"

Thunderstruck, their arms still pressing around each other, Pat and Comstock looked around them. There was nothing to see. Nothing at all.

Then the sound became words, "Sssst, the R.A.'s after you?"

"Uh huh." Comstock managed to answer.

"Count three and then press against the fifth block from the ground."

Feeling that they had absolutely nothing to lose, Comstock obeyed the whispered command.

The fifth block up looked exactly like all the others. But when Comstock pushed at it, an irregular segment suddenly swung inwards. Low light was visible for a moment through the opening. Then it vanished and Comstock, holding Pat by the hand as though to give her reassurance, but really so that he could draw strength from her nearness, stepped through the dark aperture.

AT that particular moment, back at Bowdler's house, Grundy, Helen and the owner of the robot house were seated in the library. Bowdler had his hand outstretched to a lever that projected from behind some books. His eyes were glued to a clock. He said, "Five seconds . . .

four . . . three . . ." then he shook his heavy head, and threw the lever back in its slot. "I'm afraid we'll have to give them up. It's past midnight. We'll try again at noon tomorrow."

"Don't you dare leave the force field open for a few moments more?" Grundy pleaded.

Shaking his leonine head, Bowdler pushed some books into place so that the lever was hidden from sight. "I would if I could, Grundy. But they must take their chances now."

"Even if Comstock has found that poor girl," Helen said, "what can they do out in the night?"

"Twelve more hours before they can make another attempt to reach safety here." Grundy shook his head. "I can't imagine where they can hide from the omnipresent R.A.'s."

"If only Comstock knew a little more," Helen said, "but we didn't dare try to open his eyes till you were here and it could be done under your aegis."

"The poor innocent," Bowdler said, "you were right to wait for me, but I wish things had worked out differently. Pat doesn't know much more about reality than Comstock." He sighed and then rested his big head on the myriad chins that formed a collar of flesh around his neck.

"What," Grundy asked, "will the R.A.'s do if they capture them?"

"Stun them to death, I'm afraid," Bowdler said.

"No," Helen said hopelessly, "no, they wouldn't . . ."

But the R.A.'s would, all three of them knew that. Then they just sat and waited, Bowdler staring sightlessly off into a future that only he could envisage, Helen and Grundy holding onto each other desperately in just the same fashion that Pat and Comstock were clinging to each other, as they followed someone or something through a pitch black room that seemed to stretch out forever.

THE peculiar door had swung to behind them making all seeing impossible. Comstock held his right arm around Pat's waist and held his left hand before him wishing that his finger tips could see.

The unknown voice that they had heard only once said, "Just a couple of seconds more, my buckos, and we'll be able to dispense with this blasted Stygian darkness."

A fumbling sound, a click, and then white light poured down in an iris-closing flood.

Blinking, Comstock and Pat looked around them. The room through which they had been moving sightlessly was big but not as big as their imaginations had made it. The clutter dwarfed the dimensions in any event. Ev-

ery available foot of space ahead of them was piled high with a tangle of household objects that ranged from chairs and tables to rugs and bed linen.

Their mysterious host was facing them and as their eyes became accustomed to the light they saw a man of more than average height, lean as a willow branch, a piratical smile creasing his lantern jawed face, as he opened his arms in an all embracing gesture and said, "Welcome to the Haven."

Danger had made Comstock super-cautious, otherwise he might have ruined everything right then and there; for the first thought that occurred to him was that by some stroke of incalculable luck they had stumbled onto still another rebel. But remembering that Bowdler had said that there were only four fellow fighters altogether made Comstock wait for a lead. He said, "Thanks. You've probably saved our lives."

Hands on his narrow hips, the stranger frankly eyed Pat appreciatively. A low whistle preceded his next words, "Put twenty years on you, honey child, and you're going to be a real live doll!"

If this man liked old women, Comstock reasoned, he could not be a fellow rebel. But that made his conduct even more remarkable. Go slow, very slowly and

carefully, Comstock brooded, as Pat smilingly asked, "May we know who you are?"

With vast mock-modesty, the man bowed low, and said, "I am known by a variety of names, none of them my own. I am perhaps best known as the Pica-roon." Then he waited for them to express surprise and pleasure.

They just looked at him. Slightly crestfallen he rose from his bowing position, and said, almost anxiously, "You've heard of me? The Picaroon? I steal from the poor and give to the rich?"

Comstock turned his head and looked inquiringly at Pat. She was as puzzled as he.

Considerably crestfallen the man said, "The greatest outlaw in all New Australia? The man the R.A.'s would give their left arms to capture?" A frown crossed his face, then he said as though talking to himself, "The dirty rats! They were supposed to write me up, they promised they would, when I got sick and had to become a thief."

Whirling around on tip toe like a dancer, he pointed at the accumulation of odds and ends that crowded the room. "Then what have I been working so hard for? Why have I worked my fingers to the bone stealing . . . stealing, out every night when I should be asleep, burglarizing every innocent house I come to? Why, I ask you, why? It's enough

to make a man become a cynic, that's what it is!"

Slumping into a chair that was already overcrowded with various objects, he put his head in his hands. A terrifying thought seemed to occur to him. He looked up at them. "If you don't even know who I am, if they aren't even writing up my criminal exploits, what did I go to all the trouble of preparing this Haven for? If they're not chasing me, if there is no danger, how can my cure work?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Comstock said since the man seemed to want some kind of an answer. All the while the thief had been talking, Comstock had been racking his weary brain trying to recollect what illness crime was a cure for. He couldn't remember.

A hopeful look came over the man's face and he leaped up from his seat. A long forefinger jutted out at Comstock. The man said, "I've got it. You're lying to me! You're undercover workers for the R.A. You're spies come to root me out! Luckily I have taken precautions against that very thing. The Picaroon can't be caught napping! No indeed!"

Whirling around the man who called himself the Picaroon suddenly swooped towards a pile of metallic looking objects whose identity Comstock had not yet been able to determine.

The thing he grabbed was about three feet long, made of some shining metal, was about an inch in diameter and came to a point. The handle, if that was what it was, glittered as he inserted his hand in the metallic basketwork and twirled the point of the object dangerously near Comstock's nose. Comstock felt his nostrils twitch as the object stirred up a breeze as it swirled past him.

The lean man said, "I knew this old sword would come in handy some day. No one can outwit the Picaroon." He laughed and his voice was pitched at what Comstock considered an almost hysterical note.

The point of what the Picaroon had called a sword swung back and forth in front of Pat and Comstock. With his other hand he grabbed a long loop of narrow cloth and threw it to Pat. "Tie up your fellow spy and then I'll take care of you . . ."

Comstock said, "Do as he tells you, Pat, darling. Do it instantly." His voice quavered for he had suddenly recollected what sickness it was that thieving cured.

Unexpectedly docile, Pat did as she was directed. She tied Comstock's hands behind his back, not too tightly, however, Comstock was pleased to notice, and then turning, faced their captor.

She asked, "What now, noble Picaroon?"

"Good girl," Comstock thought, "She's realized that only madmen are forced to become anti-social creatures."

Humming to himself the Picaroon whirled the point of the "sword" under Comstock's chin and said to Pat, "If only you were a little older, child, you and I could make such beautiful music together . . . But then there's no reason why I can't keep you here in the Haven till you age properly, now is there?"

"No," Pat agreed hastily, "none at all."

The lunatic whistled cheerily to himself as he cleared a free space on a couch and forced Pat to lie down on it. Then he tied her ankles with a silk scarf, and her wrists with a plastic substance that was known to have a tensile strength equal to that of the metal that this culture used for the framework of their buildings.

Donning a broad brimmed hat, and throwing a cape-like cloth around his wide shoulders, the Picaroon bowed deeply to Pat. Walking to one wall, he pressed his fingers against a projecting button and said, "'Tis not long past midnight . . . there's a bad night's work still to be done. Tonight, the Picaroon strikes again!"

HE was gone. They were alone. Comstock looked helplessly at Pat. She tried to manufacture a smile but it was no great shakes.

"If," Comstock said, "I can get this thing off my wrists, perhaps we can be out of here before that insane creature returns."

"Escape from this retreat directly into the Grandfather's Right Arms?" Pat asked gently.

Comstock stopped struggling with his bonds for a moment as he considered what she had said. "If we can fend off this 'Picaroon' until about eleven-thirty tomorrow then we can make a dash for Bowdler's house.

"I think that's our only chance, and a slim one it is."

Almost twelve hours ahead of them, at the mercy of a madman, before they could dare run the daylight gauntlet of the outdoors, under the menace of the R.A.'s. Comstock shuddered. The risk was tremendous, yet what else was there that they could do? He couldn't bear the thought of staying here in the Picaroon's Haven right around the clock, he didn't think he could stand twenty-four hours more of the nerve racking strain he was undergoing, even though that might be a more intelligent plan to attack.

Roughly twelve hours more, one way, and a full twenty-four the other . . .

Pat said, when she saw his brow furrowed with painful thought, "Now's the time to think of my name."

"Huh?" he said, not very intelligently.

"Patience and Fortitude, remember?"

He had the patience, the only question was whether or not he had the fortitude to put up with the Picaroon's mad fantasies.

At length the secret door opened and the man he was brooding about entered, bowed down with an even more useless collection of stolen objects than the ones which already burdened the room.

Striking an attitude, the Picaroon dropped the load he was carrying and roared, "Once more has the Picaroon dared the armed forces and the majesty of The Grandfather's law; once more his nimble fingers have plucked from the very heart of our solid citizenry those stolen treasures which will emblazon his name in the criminal hall of fame."

He bowed.

Pat said under her breath, "Patience and Fortitude . . ."

Then the Picaroon darted suddenly towards Comstock, his lean fingers outstretched. He said, "And you, you poisonous emissary of the forces of law and order, you, the Picaroon will punish in fitting style!"

Comstock held his breath as he

waited to see what new vagary had further addled the brain of their insane captor.

CHAPTER 11

BEFORE the Picaroon's fingers had quite tightened around Comstock's throat, Pat called out, "Perhaps there is some good reason why your exploits have not been emblazoned for all to read!"

The strong fingers slowly opened and the madman turned towards Pat.

Taking the cue, Comstock said hurriedly, "Yes, maybe your crimes have not been particularly spectacular!" Some place in Bowdler's huge library Comstock had run across a book devoted to the exploits of a super criminal. Rummaging through his memory, Comstock said, "I've got it! I know just the thing that the Picaroon can do that will insure his infamy becoming noticed."

As Pat began to speak, the Picaroon's head swivelled back and forth between her and Comstock. His steel grey eyes were no longer menacing, Comstock was pleased to note.

"How about," Pat suggested, "how about stealing . . ."

"One of the R.A.'s cars," Comstock interjected.

"Just what I was going to say. And then with the aid of the car, he can . . ."

"Go to the fountainhead, beard The Grandfather in his retreat."

"And make sure that his most fantastic and fabulous crime will become known to every living creature in our world by . . ."

"Snipping off The Grandfather's beard!" Comstock finished. Then he waited, his teeth pressed together on his bottom lip.

"But," the Picaroon said, in a rather bemused fashion, "that would be blasphemy."

"But think of the effrontery of it!" Pat said, leaning forward hopefully, paying no attention to the bonds that held her.

"Think of the shock of such an action! Every law abiding citizen would rise up in wrath. Then the hue and cry would be such that no longer would the Picaroon work long hard hours through the night without ever getting the fame which is his due." Comstock could hardly believe that even this lunatic would fall for what they were suggesting.

"What a colossal feat . . ." the Picaroon said, almost to himself, "Why didn't I think of it?"

His long legs carried him around the room, as unthinkingly, he strode up and down over the various bundles that were strewn around the floor.

A thought struck the man who called himself the Picaroon. "Where could we steal an R.A.'s car?"

This, of course, was the crux of Comstock's plan. Looking as unconcerned as he could, Comstock said, "Why, it just happens that Pat and I know where there is an abandoned car."

"An abandoned car?" The Picaroon grinned delightedly, snapped his fingers and said, "Then come, the night is young and there is dirty work to be done!" Running to Pat's side he released her. She rose, rubbed her fingers to restore the circulation and then untied Comstock.

Comstock eyed her torn dress, the involuntary deshabelle that revealed more of her firm young b.....s than he thought any other man in the world should be in a position to observe and said to the Picaroon, "Remember, this is a most dangerous adventure on which we are about to embark. We are wanted as badly by the R.A.'s as you will be once you have snipped off The Grandfather's beard! We'd best wear some disguise."

"Then," the Picaroon said, "You two are really not police spies at all, are you?"

"Wait and see what the R.A.'s do to us if they catch us," Pat said grimly, while she rooted through a rag bag of old clothes trying to find some sort of garment with which to clothe herself.

"How exciting," the Picaroon said, slapping his hands together

in delight, "and to think I was just about to crown my criminal career by murdering this man."

Comstock tried not to think about how close his demise had been and watched fascinatedly while Pat dropped her torn dress to the floor and donned a shapeless gown.

But when he saw the Picaroon was busy searching for male clothes he turned away from the delectable sight of Pat's n.e.e body and took the clothes that the Picaroon gave him. A floppy hat had a big enough brim so that in the dark Comstock's face would be hidden. A tight pair of trousers and a too big jacket of a different color than the things he had been wearing would have to suffice as a disguise. All Comstock could do really, was hope and pray that they would be able to get, with the Picaroon's aid, near enough to Bowdler's house so that while the Picaroon was busy trying to understand the mechanics of the abandoned car, he and Pat could make a run for it through the force field at the proper time.

THE trip through the darkened city was a revelation to both Pat and Comstock. In Comstock's earlier, law-abiding incarnation, there had never been a night that found him in bed later than the curfew at ten. To find that the streets were completely deserted

at two, or three o'clock in the morning came as no surprise, since he knew that all lawful souls would, of course, be asleep at that time.

But he had not been an alcoholic for a long enough period to find out that the bars stayed open long after midnight. The only people that there was the slightest chance of trouble with, were the roisterers who staggered out of the saloons from time to time, and here the danger was slight, for as soon as an inebriate hove into view the Picaroon would wink mightily, link arms with Pat on one side and with Comstock on the other and the trio would mimic drunkenness and sing bawdy songs till the real drunks were gone.

"What," Comstock asked, "are the chances of bumping into an R.A.?"

"Aha!" The Picaroon placed his long forefinger next to his nose. "You are attempting to tear aside the veil that hides the Picaroon's methods!"

"Fiddle faddle," Pat said nastily, "answer him!"

Coming to a halt on a silent street corner under a lamp post that cast a spotlight down around his piratical figure, the Picaroon said, "At night, after curfew, when all law-abiding citizens sleep . . ." He lowered his voice to a shadow of a whisper forcing Pat and Comstock to

place their ears near his mouth, "you realize, don't you, both of you, that I am giving away my most cherished secret, the modus operandi that allows me to operate and so flout the law?"

They nodded.

"Then let it be known, but just to us, that I have found when all the other law-abiding citizens sleep, why, so do the R.A.'s."

Twirling in a mad pirouette, the Picaroon threw back his head and laughed. "From curfew to dawn, there is no law!"

Clapping a hand over the Picaroon's mouth, Comstock snapped, "Shut up! You'll rouse the dead with all that noise!"

A little sobered the Picaroon said, "Now you have my most valued secret, see that you guard it with your lives!" Putting his finger to his lips he added, "Hissst . . ."

Pat asked, "What is it?"

"Nothing," the Picaroon said, "I just like to say hissst . . ."

Shrugging behind the Picaroon's back, Comstock gestured to Pat to pay no mind to their mad guide. Aloud, he asked, "Do you know your way to 14 Anthony Comstock Road?"

"I know all the ways," The Picaroon said, and again taking the lead, walked with exaggerated steps, on tip toe, as though fearing to wake the sleeping world.

It was a long trip on foot and dawn was breaking as they came in sight of some landmarks that Comstock remembered. If his mental picture of the terrain was correct, the car in which Grundy, Helen and he had made their escape from the Fathers should be downhill from where he and Pat and the Picaroon were now standing.

He conveyed this information to the others and this time he took the lead with Pat behind him and the Picaroon still walking on tip toe bringing up the rear.

As they went downhill Comstock could see his goal. Bowdler's house lay still and quiet, the refuge for which he yearned. But it might just as well have been on the other side of his world for all the good it was as long as the force field surrounded it.

Waiting till the Picaroon's attention was on the car in the distance, Comstock pointed at the house and whispered to Pat, "That's it."

She nodded.

Then they reached the car and the Picaroon's almost idiot glee reached its apogee as he poked at the thing under the hood that made the "car" move.

Comstock didn't have the vaguest idea of whether or not the car could run. When he and Grundy and Helen had abandoned it, it had simply gone ca-

reening downhill and finally stopped. Why it stopped, or whether it would ever go again was an impenetrable question to Comstock.

But he didn't allow his lack of knowledge to stand in his way. Becoming dictatorial he told the Picaroon to stop fooling about with the mechanism and to watch and try to learn how to make the car go.

Then with the Picaroon standing at attention, Comstock got into the car, and went through the complex series of actions which in Grundy's case had served to animate the vehicle.

There was a muttering rumble from the "car" and it surged internally. However the rock which had halted its forward progress in the first place, still served to prevent it from proceeding.

THE Picaroon snapped into action, and going to the rear of the "car" he pushed as the wheels of the vehicle began to spin to no avail at all.

At this point, Comstock, anxious to stall things as long as he could, since there was no chance of entering Bowdler's house till the sun was overhead, tried to turn off the motor. Instead he threw the motor into reverse and the car instantly backed up, carrying the Picaroon along with it.

He dangled from the rear of the car trying to muscle himself

up out of the danger of the wheels while he yelled at the top of his lungs for Comstock to stop whatever he was doing.

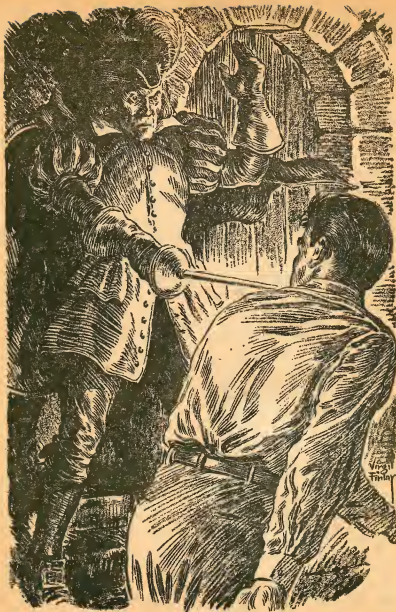
Pat sat on the side of the road being of no help to Comstock at all, since she was busy being convulsed by giggles. The sight of the long-legged madman, his no longer jaunty cape entangled in his thrashing limbs, while Comstock wildly snapped things on and off on the control board, and the unguided car veered and yawed as it ran backwards up the steep hill was a little more than she could stand.

When the car had backed almost to the crest of the hill, Comstock found the key which turned the ignition on and off and managed to bring the "car" to a halt.

The Picaroon was in a towering fury. "Poltroon!" he roared at Comstock who was red-faced with embarrassment and anxiety. "How dare you treat a criminal figure of my stature in a manner more befitting some low comedy person like you?"

Dropping from the rear of the "car" the Picaroon raced around towards the driving wheel where Comstock sat helplessly trying to deduce what had gone wrong with his method of driving the "car".

The Picaroon's right hand darted out of sight under his cape and when it came back into view, Comstock was horrified to



see that a steel blade perhaps ten inches long had become integral to the maniac's right hand.

"Blood!" the Picaroon stated almost calmly, "blood is the only thing that will erase this stain that you have placed on my criminal escutcheon."

With that he darted the sharp point of the knife straight at what would have been Comstock's Adam's apple, had not a beginning double chin covered it with fat.

There is no doubt that Comstock would have died at the wheel of the car, with a slit throat had not Pat, seeing the direction that the madman's mind was taking, picked up a rock and smashed it down on the Picaroon's head just in the only too well known nick of time.

Breath whooshed out of Comstock's lungs as he saw the knife blade falter, and then saw the Picaroon's head come careening down. Wide-eyed he watched as the man's unconscious body tumbled to the ground.

As soon as the Picaroon landed, Pat was at his side and her questing hand first took the knife from his flaccid grip and then she examined the rest of the arsenal that hung from the man's belt hidden till now by the all-encompassing cloth of his ridiculous cape.

The plethora of weapons clinked and clanked as she placed

them to one side. She said, "When you get your breath, come and take some of these for yourself, dear."

COMSTOCK found that if he didn't pay too much attention to the way his knees wobbled that he could navigate. Getting out of the car was hardest. Once he was on firm ground again he found that the various alarums and excursions through which he had lived had served to, if not make him callous to danger, at least make him bounce back a little faster than he had at the beginning of his departure from his normal way of life.

Holding his right forefinger on his left pulse for a moment he wondered why his poor weak heart had not long ago surrendered beneath the various assaults that had been made on it. But when he found that his pulse seemed to be practically normal he forgot about his heart until kneeling down next to Pat he smelled the fragrance of her hair. This time he did not have to take his pulse. He could feel his heart pounding.

She looked sideways at him and smiled gently. They were both kneeling next to the prostrate Picaroon. Their mouths were on a level. This made their kissing almost automatic.

The kiss might have lasted even longer than it did had not

the Picaroon stirred. Pat broke away from Comstock's embrace and said, "We'd best tie him up so that we don't have any more trouble with him."

"By all means," Comstock said muzzily, his mind still concerned with the nearness of her.

It was only when she rose and went to the car looking for something with which to bind their captive that Comstock was able to think, shake his head and force his addled brain into action again.

Then using the cape as a blanket, Comstock swathed the madman in its folds. Next, when Pat returned with some rope they wound it around and around the man till he was completely bound.

Then, and only then, did Comstock turn and look across the distance that separated them from Bowdler's house and safety. The sun was well up now, which was good in that it shortened their waiting time, but was bad since it meant that the R.A.'s would be out on patrol in full force.

Pat, standing at his side, voiced his thoughts when she said, "Isn't there some way that we could signal to your friends so that we need not wait out here till noon?"

"The big danger to be avoided is that the R.A.'s may see us and so suspect the house."

Below them, the Picaroon rolled his head back and forth angrily. This was the only part of him that he could move. He said, "So you *were* spies!" He spat. "I should have known. Always should the master criminal work alone. All the text books I have read make that point. It serves me right for not being a lone mink . . . or wolf or whatever the earth word is."

Comstock paid no attention to his grumbling as he tried to assay the situation. They could not endanger the safety of the house by just walking into view of one of the windows and waving to capture the attention of Grundy or Helen.

If an R.A. were to see that . . .

Since that was impossible, what were their chances of being unobserved for . . . looking up at the sun he tried to estimate how long it would be before noon. Perhaps two hours yet.

Putting his arm around Pat's waist he said, "Let's get as close to the force field as we can so that when it is lifted we can just make a dash for the house."

"And take a chance of being seen by an R.A.?"

That was right. When Bowdler told him to come back to the house at noon or midnight, he had had no way of knowing just how badly the R.A.'s would be wanting to get hold of Pat and Comstock. It hardly seemed pos-

sible to Comstock that so little time had passed since he had left the house and safety the day before to go hunting for an unknown girl.

He gulped as he realized what the tenor of his thinking meant. He said plaintively, "You mean we'll have to wait till midnight before we dare go to the house?"

She nodded.

Then, as one person they turned and looked down at the Picaroon. It would be unfair to keep the poor lunatic tied up the way he was for at least fourteen more hours . . .

The Picaroon was mumbling to himself, "You are who you are, if you think you are . . ."

Blinking thoughtfully, Comstock turned to Pat and said, "You know, that's very interesting question. I'd like to think about it for a while."

"While you're thinking about it, darling, devote a little of your brain power to figuring out where we're going to get food and water to last us till midnight . . ."

The madman's words pounded at Comstock's brain washing away the reality of what the girl had said. "But how do you know you are?" That was a very interesting question.

Still squatting on his heels, Comstock looked unseeingly off into the distance and wondered what in the name of The Grand-

father the answer to the lunatic's question could be.

He was something or someone called Comstock, he was sure of that. But how could he know he was Comstock, for sure, that is?

He was so engrossed that he did not even hear the Picaroon's mad giggle as the man said to Pat, "See . . . see what my little question did to him? That's what happened to the first four doctors who examined me!" He laughed again. "That was when the Fathers decided that I was a madman and that my only cure was to become a criminal."

Worry made itself visible on Pat's face as she turned from looking at Comstock who was completely withdrawn inside himself. She looked down at their captive and asked, "Who were you before you became the Picaroon?"

The harsh piratical face lost its Harlequinesque self-derision as the man said, "I was the last philosopher."

CHAPTER 12

THERE was something so infinitely sad in the man's words that Pat was emotionally moved. Not knowing what a philosopher might be did not prevent her from feeling sorry that the bound man had been the last of whatever it was that he had been.

Comstock never knew about the conversation that the quondam Picaroon had with Pat, for all the while that the girl and the bound man talked, Comstock was in a little world of his own trying to chase down the reality of his own existence.

Sitting on the ground next to the man who called himself the Picaroon and the last philosopher, Pat found herself involved in a discussion of what the man spoke of as the eternal verities.

The sun rose higher and higher in the sky, noon came and went while Comstock went deeper and deeper into himself searching for the answer that does not exist.

When he had not moved for many hours, Pat tore herself away from what she was being told and asked, "What can I do for him?"

For the first time in many hours the philosopher gave place to the Picaroon and the madman, laughing gleefully as he said, "All you need do is find the answer for which he is questing. That will bring him out of the grey world into which the question has driven him."

Looking at Comstock, Pat felt fear like a live thing. There was no intelligence on his soft face. None at all. His eyes were unfocussed, his breathing very slow. His arms were hooked around his knees which were

drawn up towards his chest. He had fallen over on his side.

Luckily Pat had no idea of what the foetal position looks like or she would have been even more frightened than she was.

Pat asked hesitantly, "Will you tell me the answer so that I can help him come back?"

Then the madman threw his lean face back and howled.

Wringing her hands, Pat wondered what had come over the man who such a short time before had told her wonderful things of which she had never dreamed.

When he was strangling with his own mirth, the man gasped, "My dear, I would gladly give the answer . . . that's what I devoted all my life to searching for . . . but the humor of it all is that there is no answer."

Then another paroxysm of laughter swept through him.

Deep down inside Comstock's brain in the never-never land to which the last philosopher's question had driven him, Comstock was dully aware that his body was being stroked. It felt nice and he made an animal sound deep in his throat. But the action did not serve to revive him any more than Pat's anxious voice which was shouting in his unhearing ears.

He never heard her say, "Darling, you *must* come back! The R.A.'s are coming."

Comstock never knew when a squad of R.A.'s surrounded the car, and by means of a frightening array of stun-guns forced Pat to help them carry first the tied-up lunatic and then the unresisting body of the man she loved into the car in which they had driven onto the scene.

INSIDE Bowdler's house Grundy, Helen and the owner of the robot house sighed as midnight came and went. Bowdler voiced all their feelings when he said, "I am afraid we must give them up for lost. We have waited through three periods. There has been no sign of them. None at all."

While he was saying this, the R.A.'s were driving away with Comstock, Pat and the Pica-roon.

"Then we can wait no longer?" Helen asked.

Shaking his head, Bowdler said, "No."

Grundy rose to his feet as he murmured, "I'm glad. This waiting has been worse than anything that the Board of Fathers can mete out to us."

Helen and Grundy paused at the door of the house and looked back regretfully. Grundy spoke, "It's been a wonderful month we had, we can remember that, darling."

She kissed him and they walked out into the darkness with

Bowdler close behind them.

He said, "I shall be with you, and you can depend on my helping in any way that I can."

"To face the Board of Fathers!" Grundy's face was set. "I'll tell them a few home truths no matter what they finally decide to do to us."

"You're so brave, sweetheart," Helen said. And looked at him admiringly.

"But it's still The Grandfather whom I fear the most." Grundy was honest enough to add.

Bowdler laid his heavy hands on each of them and said, "Courage."

Then they started on the way to their fates.

IN the R.A.'s car, Pat sat between the lump of unresisting flesh that Comstock had become and the cocoonlike figure of the philosopher.

The man who was a criminal in spite of himself observed the way Pat looked down at Comstock and his harshly handsome face softened.

"My dear, perhaps it is better that he be the way he is, if what you have told me is true and you are both rebels against the bonds that chain all of us on this sorry world of ours. I fear what the Board of Fathers or The Grandfather may decide may be much worse than this condition that my question has caused."

"To die is hard, but to die without knowing that you are dying, is horrible," Pat said through clenched teeth.

"It is unmanly, I will not gain-say that." Then the man was silent.

Ahead of them the odd buildings that housed the Board and The Grandfather rose up in their way. The globular buildings inside of which were both the Elders and the Fathers were dwarfed by the height of the shaft of The Grandfather's residence.

The R.A.'s were as silent and seemingly unthinking as machines. Their first visible emotion had been one of jubilation at having caught Pat and Comstock but that had faded under the fear of punishment for not having caught them sooner.

They sat statue still, their hands on their guns as the car drove up to the entrance of the buildings.

One of the R.A.'s left the machine to go for further orders from his superior officer.

In the car the last philosopher said softly, "Perhaps whatever little nobility there is in man is best served by dying with one's eyes open. I shall not again retreat into the lie of the Pica-roon." He smiled gently at Pat, and said, "I think I will like dying as one of you, as a rebel."

But all Pat's attention was on

her beloved who had never stirred from the curled up position into which his thoughts had forced him.

Seeing this, the last philosopher said, "There is one chance, and only one that I can think of that may revive him. Perhaps love, an emotion of which I know very little, may be strong enough to pull him out of that place to which he has run for safety."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"To me," the man said, "as a philosopher, the charms of love and sex were never very strong. But I should imagine, just as pure speculation, that the two must be very tightly entwined."

Deep, deep down inside the thing that Comstock had become he felt a stirring of some kind of interest. He did not yet know what was causing the sensation, he could not hear the love words that Pat was whispering in his ear, he was not really conscious of her soft hands caressing him, but something was taking place, something that seemed to have reality in a place where there was no such thing.

SO it was that the guards of the R.A. were as shocked by her behavior as earlier the waiting crowd had been when Comstock and Pat had broken the deepest, strongest held taboo of their culture.

At their side, the last philosopher chuckled as he saw the guards blanch, then turn their eyes away.

Their livid faces were turned from the scene as Pat literally drew Comstock back from the bourne to which he had retreated.

Gasping, astounded, Comstock came back to reality. He was terribly shocked when he saw what Pat had done, but this shock gave place to an even bigger one when he realized that they had been captured, that they were in front of The Grandfather's Retreat, and that there was no longer any chance for escape.

None at all.

Gasping, he asked, "What happened? Where have I been? How did we get here? Why don't I remember coming here?"

"Don't repeat my question," the last philosopher said, "or he may be trapped by it again."

Slurring over the crux of the matter, Pat gently tried to bring Comstock up to date.

The guards recovered some of their equanimity and brutally shoved all three of them out of the car. The last philosopher, still bound, crashed to his face as they evicted him. Pat hurried to untie him, and help him to his feet.

Then, inside a living square formed by the R.A.'s they were ushered back into the ante-room which Comstock, Grundy and

Helen had escaped from a month earlier.

Surprise was piled on surprise for Comstock. When the R.A.'s shoved him into the room he saw, waiting, sitting in chairs, Helen and Grundy. Standing, pacing back and forth was Bowdler, his heavy face set with thought.

Helen cried, "We thought you were dead!"

Then there were introductions, and explanations, and it was only when Bowdler finally interrupted and said, "Hold everything. You realize it is late at night, and it is only because of the uniqueness of the situation that the Board of Fathers is sitting in extraordinary session, in order to decide what to do with you all, that I am here."

This sufficed to let Comstock and Pat know that Bowdler was still playing his double game.

Helen whispered in Comstock's ear. "Bowdler pretended that he had captured us and brought us here and then invoked the special session of the Fathers."

Just as the door that led into the Board of Fathers began to open, Bowdler said, his voice harsh with urgency, "I want you to go in there, not as prisoners come to judgment, but as stalwarts who demand a fitting place in the government of our world."

"Audacity, my little ones, audacity is the order of the day!" Bowdler smiled as he saw the

puzzlement spread over Comstock's and Pat's faces. "Follow the lead of Grundy and Helen. I've had time to tell them a little more than I have told you two!"

The door was open wide now, and as Comstock girded his loins preparatory to what he was sure would be a battle to the death against impossible odds, the R.A. who had entered, bowed to Bowdler and said, "The Fathers request your presence, Father Bowdler."

Then their last prop was gone, and they just sat and waited, staring at the door which had closed behind Bowdler.

THE three who had endured so much sat and waited. The three plus Pat and the last philosopher. When you have fought for as long as they had against forces strong almost beyond imagining, when you have struggled in despair, lived without daring to think, hope, when it finally comes is almost anticlimactic. At least Comstock found it so. Despite the traps, the violence, the hurts, the fear, they were now where they wanted to be.

They sat quietly, their hands folded, and if any feeling of triumph was in them, it was so muted as not to be observable. At that precise moment, when they sat in the anteroom, waiting for their reward, if reward it

were to be, the only common emotion they shared was that they had fought a good fight. Fought as hard as it is in a person to fight for what they consider right.

Then the door opened and instead of the summons to come before the Board of Fathers which they had expected, The Grandfather entered the room. The Grandfather, with his high hooked nose, his broad forehead, deep set harsh old blue eyes, focussed on the middle distance, his strong old hands crossed on his stomach just below his patriarchal beard, his tremendous height forcing him to look down at them.

It was hard to believe.

Hard to believe that they, or anyone below the rank of Father would ever actually behold Him in the flesh.

When He spoke His voice was all the things they had known it would be . . . Deep as an organ base, calm, full of authority, stern, yet with a leavening of those other things that make up the whole man, his voice was almost gentle as he said, "Follow me, please."

They rose, and feeling like little children, followed his preposterously tall, spare back, out of the ante-room, into that other room where the Board awaited them.

There was no fear in them now

as there would have been earlier. For they were not coming before the Board for judgement, but to be rewarded. At least that's what Grundy and Helen had been told by Bowdler.

The Grandfather pointed out Comstock, Helen and Grundy, and said, "These three are the original ones. The other two," his gesture pointed out the last philosopher and Pat, "are the newer recruits."

There was silence.

"They have come to join us," The Grandfather said.

The silence expanded.

"Gentlemen, Fathers all, these are three new Fathers." The Grandfather's voice faded away and there was no other sound. Some of the men who made up the Board of Fathers said a word.

But the ones who had fought their way up to this eminence stood in silence and looking about them, examined the men with whom they would now share the control of their whole world.

This was the moment of their triumph.

CHAPTER 13

WHEN Bowdler and Grundy had first sounded out Comstock and had asked him the questions that had led him so far from the normal law-abiding life that had been his, one of the

mainsprings of his conduct had been envy mixed with disgust that the Fathers whom formerly he had so revered had become monsters in his mind. Monsters who had used the whole planet as a breeding ground for their harems. For when the thought that only the Fathers were really fathers had struck Comstock he had resolved that he too would like to take part in such noble work.

Along with the sexual motive, Comstock had decided that if the Fathers controlled the world, he too would like to have a share in either controlling the world as it was, or perhaps with luck, helping to change the control in such a way that their world would be a better place to live in.

This mixture of ideas had resulted in his mental picture of the Fathers becoming an amalgam of monsters of pride, venery and power.

Looking about the room Comstock decided that he could not possibly have been further wrong in the way he had pictured the Fathers.

For his first feeling as his unbelieving eyes swept around the table at which the Fathers sat, was one of pity.

Far from being the creatures with inflated egos, the monsters of uxoriousness that his inflamed imagination had painted, these men who guided the affairs of

his world were invalids . . . The lame, the halt and the blind.

Each face was torn by pain, every body bore the stigmata of some fatal disease.

Only the Grandfather, ridiculously tall and spare, standing at the far end of the gigantic room was as his imagination had foretold He would be.

In the silence that greeted them Comstock finally turned to Grundy and said, "I . . . I don't understand."

The Grandfather walked to the head of the table and prepared to speak. While they waited, Grundy whispered, "Think a moment. The only cure for disease that our people know is vice. Right?"

Nodding, Comstock waited.

"But the only people on the whole planet who know how this cure works, what psychic machinery is involved, are the Fathers."

Comstock gulped and thought of his heart.

"To become a Father," Grundy added hurriedly as The Grandfather raised his hand for silence, "is a sentence of death. For once you know how sin cures sickness, it can no longer cure you."

"Fathers," The Grandfather said, and involuntarily, Comstock felt his heart fill with awe, so imbued had his upbringing been with respect and worship of

the figure called The Grandfather; he tried to control the emotion that threatened to unman him, for his temptation was to fall down before The Grandfather.

"Fathers," the deep organ bass went on, "you know why we are gathered in this extraordinary conclave. So successful has been the regime that I have caused to come into being, that no longer can we hope to recruit new Fathers from amongst those brave souls who rebel against the government we have set up. Not for fifty years has a new rebel appeared to challenge our power. Therefore, as you all know, Father Bowdler, because he is the healthiest appearing of any of you, was empowered to go out into the world and find rebellious souls whom we may be able to use as leaders.

"I feared when first I caused the apparatus of power to be set up as I have done, that there would be instant and successful rebellion. It did not then occur to me that I would be too successful and that rebellion would be bred out of the blood of our people.

"We have, as you know only too well, arrived at a period of stasis from which our world may never recover.

"It therefore devolves upon the men who stand before you as well as the women who have

made common cause with them, to come to our aid.

"Now that aid is to be given, what these new Fathers will be able to do before death claims them, I do not know. All that I can say with any assurance, is that if something is not done and done quickly, our world will go down the road to static death, never knowing what has toppled it from the high estate it held."

COMSTOCK'S mind was almost incapable of digesting what The Grandfather was saying. It had all happened much too quickly. To be raised in a matter of moments from a position where death seemed imminent first to a position on the Board of Fathers, and now, if he understood correctly, to be told that the future of the world was somehow his responsibility, was just too much.

His first instinctual response was to desire escape. Turning around he saw, directly behind him, a door which was ajar. Not that he wanted to escape very far, he just wanted to go off in a dark corner and sit and think the whole thing out.

The Grandfather was still speaking, as Comstock, unobserved, began to step backwards. The others, Comstock's fellow rebels were leaning forward, greedily drinking in what The Grandfather was saying.

"You will, in the next day or two," The Grandfather was saying as Comstock backed closer to the door, "be told just how our government operates. You will be told how, when the last scientists were martyred by an unreasoning mob, they tried, before death claimed them, in their wisdom to set up non-mechanical devices that would cure the sick. They knew that in the period of dark reaction by which they were swept to death, anything that smelled of machinery was doomed to destruction.

"You will then understand why I was in effect forced to cause this world of ours to enter a period of the strictest moral upbringing. Only under such a regime could the psychosomatic mechanisms that the scientists had explained, be able to work.

"I have been only too successful as you know. I have, by the restrictions I set up, brought into being a world where people fear sickness not because of the pain it brings, but because of the shame the sins which cure it bring in its path."

Then the door was near enough so that Comstock was able to duck through it. There was a hard bench just outside and as Comstock sat down on it, his brain awl, he heard the deep voice of The Grandfather say, just as Comstock pushed the door closed, "But enough of the

way our world works now. I think the next subject under discussion will be just what we can do to make our world take the step from an inner-directed culture with ancestor-directed overtones, on and up to the next normal step which is an other-directed culture."

INASMUCH as the last thing that Comstock remembered clearly was when he brought the "car" under control and then tied up the man he knew as the Picaroon, he sat on the hard bench, his buttock muscles sore from lack of sleep, his stomach gurgling loudly from lack of food and water, and tried to reconstruct just what had been happening to him.

It was no use. There was a lapse he could not account for. He remembered that the Picaroon had asked him a question, but luckily he could not remember how it was phrased, and then the next thing he knew he was getting out of the R.A.'s car, being guided into the fearful sanctum of the Fathers, and then, first fearing instant death, he had then been apprised of his accession to power. Then the membership of the Board of Fathers had been revealed to be a sentence of death, and before his weary, battered brain could recover from that, The Grandfather had made it clear that the world's future

was somehow his responsibility.

Comstock was only too aware of his mortality, as everyone is when fatigue has lowered one's defenses. He slouched down on the bench and tried to rationalize some of the recent events.

Aside from Pat, he would be only too grateful if the whole benighted affair had never been and he could once more awaken in bed with his mother near to comfort him.

The door on the far side of the room opened and an R.A. entered. Comstock was sunk too far down in a welter of self-pity to do more than raise his head tiredly and look at the R.A.'s stern face. The uniformed man produced a stun-gun and said, "You are under arrest."

Before Comstock could bother to tell the man that he was a little behind in his knowledge of what had been happening, the gun did its work.

Stunned, Comstock fell off the bench and crashed onto the floor. His head landed so hard that the result was instant unconsciousness. The effect of the gun's energy bolt would merely have been to immobilize his bodily functions. But the blow knocked him out.

WHEN he opened his eyes and was again aware of life and its processes, he had been moved. He did not know it immediately

but he had been transferred to The Grandfather's aerie.

The first thing that Comstock was aware of was the fact that he was seated in a chair unlike any he had ever seen before. It was big, and comfortable in a way, except that from the arms of it came metal bands that encompassed his forearms preventing the slightest movement. Around his legs, similar bands held his calves against the legs of the chair.

Directly in front of him was the most tremendous desk he had ever seen. Around the walls of the room which was completely circular were little holes, just big enough for the muzzles of stun-guns to project through. The port holes were no more than ten inches apart so that every inch of his body was being menaced at all times.

As intelligence returned to him, he looked dully at the too tall figure of The Grandfather who sat behind the desk. The long beard curved gracefully down the giant chest. More tired than he had ever been in his life, Comstock thought in woolly fashion of how nice it would be to curl up in The Grandfather's lap, as he had been taught by his mother, and forget all his cares.

Thinking of The Grandfather's lap made him remember, with a guilty start, that he had no idea of what had happened to Pat.

Before he could ask, The Grandfather said, "You have managed to do something that no one has done in more years than I like to think about. Why did you sneak away from the Board room, Comstock?"

The omnipresent muzzles of the circle of stun-guns preyed heavily on Comstock's muddled mind. He did not answer the question.

The Grandfather said, "I am not used to having to ask a question twice. Why did you leave when I was speaking? Did you not believe what I was saying?"

There was a curious expression, Comstock realized, on The Grandfather's face. Was it possible that what The Grandfather had said, down below, was not the truth? Could it be that Bowdler was as befuddled as the rest of them? Was some tremendous game, so complicated as not to be understood being played?

"I am waiting," The Grandfather said.

Comstock's slack face betrayed nothing. He was too tired, too confused, too upset to even hazard an opinion. Finally he croaked, "The only reason I left, was because I wanted to think."

"To think?" The tone was satirical. "Curious, most of my people are content to allow me to do all the thinking."

How despairingly Comstock wished that he too could let The Grandfather do all his thinking, but it was much too late for that.

Hunching over his desk, The Grandfather leaned forward and said, "Speak up, man, don't force me to employ certain methods which I have used on occasion."

Speak up! When all he wanted to do was lay his weary head on that comforting beard and forget everything? Speak up when his tongue was thick with thirst and his stomach growling with hunger? Speak up when his sleepless head was involuntarily dropping from time to time from sheer fatigue?

Why didn't the old fool leave him alone? How far could a man be pushed? What did he have to lose now that he knew that membership on the Board of Fathers meant a lingering death by heart disease? A wave of adrenalin shot through his system as anger burned brightly.

He almost snarled as he asked, "Suppose *you* do some answering? Suppose *I* ask the questions for a change?"

Leaning back in his chair The Grandfather's face reflected no emotion at all.

Comstock snapped. "Suppose you tell me how you've stayed in power so long! Some of those earth books I read in Bowdler's library made me wonder about a lot of things, Grandfather. And

I'd like to know some of the answers!

"Tell me, how have you stayed in power so long?"

"Because," The Grandfather said, "since you ask, because of fear."

Of that emotion there was none in Comstock. He was beyond any ordinary feelings at all. They had all been washed away.

CHAPTER 14

FEAR?" Comstock hazarded, for at the moment the word meant nothing to him. Nothing at all.

"Fear," The Grandfather said, repeating the word again, "is my bulwark. Cowardice my armor. I am the most frightened man in our world. That is the reason I am The Grandfather. Until the day comes that a more frightened man, a more cowardly human being arises, I shall rule. No brave man can ever breach my defenses, because no brave man can ever know the things I fear. Since I am always fearful my mind is filled with ideas as to where and how I may be attacked. Since this is so, I spend all my waking hours building up my guard against any such attacks.

"The nights," he said thoughtfully, "I spend in nightmares in which all my defenses crumble."

Comstock sat across the room from The Grandfather, his arms enclosed in the cage like affair that immobilized him. Through apertures in the walls at shoulder height he could see the stock-still muzzles of the stun-guns that were trained on him. He brought his attention back to The Grandfather. The man's long, thin face was raddled with what seemed like fear. Tics jerked monstrosly at the corners of his mouth and at his haggard eyes.

"How," Comstock asked, "can you sit under the menace of the guns that surround us? Aren't you afraid that one of the gunners may shoot you?"

"You see," the lean, bearded face was full of envy, "You see, you think like a brave man and that is why you will never be able to overcome me. Only a brave man could sit under the guns . . . unless, he had the foresight to have done what I have. Behind the gunners of which you are aware, there is another set of gunners, each of whom has a gun pointed at the head of the gunner who has been honored by being my guard."

Comstock thought of this for a while and then he said, "And do the secondary gunners have tertiary gunners menacing them?"

The Grandfather smiled delightedly, "There! You see, you are beginning to think like a

coward. Fear like mine is infectious. Of course there are tertiary and quaternary and quinternary gunners!"

In the lengthening pause that followed this statement of The Grandfather's, Comstock wondered if this was right, was fear the thing that held him on the pinnacle he had made his own?

The Grandfather said, "I am not sure that I have convinced you. Observe my face, the way fear tears at it. Consider that I am so cowardly that my stomach digests itself rather than the food I force into it. Realize that the only pleasure my fear allows me to enjoy is that of power and then try to realize how helpless a brave man like you who spreads his pleasure between the table and the bed must be in the face of my one, all-consuming pleasure."

"You can eat for perhaps three hours a day," The Grandfather went on, "depending on your sexual appetite and your years, you can spend an hour, perhaps two in play at sex. But I can spend every waking minute of every day on my pleasure."

He smiled. "You are helpless, bound by your bravery, you fool!"

And Comstock, considering the matter wondered if The Grandfather was right. One Achilles heel alone remained to attack. Could a coward foresee

rashness, foolhardy bravery? Or would a coward be unable to intuitively foresee such an action, to grapple with it; not that he, Comstock, was brave.

Only one other way occurred to Comstock in which the matter could be tested.

Leaning his upper trunk as far forward as his bonds would allow, he said slowly, throwing his words into the teeth of the bearded man who faced him, "You are a liar."

It is an understatement to say that The Grandfather was surprised. His face was absolutely blank as he repeated the word, "Liar?" questioningly.

COMSTOCK was aware in the lengthening silence of the immobility of the single-eyed muzzles of the stun-guns which surrounded him. Not since he had opened his eyes in that singular room had one of the guns so much as twitched.

"Surely," Comstock said. "For instance, there is no one behind any of the guns that seem to menace me."

Lean fingers were busy caressing the silken hairs of the beard that cascaded down The Grandfather's chest. The gaunt face surrounded by the aureole of hair was intent. "How?" he asked, "could you tell that?"

"Because I am *really* a coward." Comstock said almost bold-

ly. "And I know that no coward could really take the chance that an involuntary tightening of a trigger finger, caused, perhaps by a sneeze, could and would mean death. And I know too that it takes courage of a sort to talk about one's own cowardice. For instance, I find this that I am saying very difficult. That little prepared speech you delivered convinced me of only one thing. You are not afraid of anything."

The Grandfather's hand reached out to his desk and his almost too long index finger darted out and pressed a button. Instantly the bonds that had held Comstock immobile in the chair loosened.

The Grandfather said slowly, "Bowdler chose wisely when he selected you as a rebel. Perhaps more wisely even than he knew."

Comstock moved his arms about in the chair, having no desire now that the bonds were no longer holding him, to get to his feet. He was afraid that his wobbling knees would fail to support him. Massaging his arms where the metallic bonds had bitten deep, he waited with some trepidation for what might happen. Whatever it was, he feared it would be highly unpleasant.

It was.

The Grandfather rose from behind the desk and looking down at Comstock from his not inconsiderable height of six feet

ten inches, said, "Since, as you have so truly pointed out, the secret of my continued power is not fear, what then, is my secret?"

Comstock had devoted a great deal of cerebration to just this point, but that did not make it any easier to say it aloud.

In the lengthening silence, The Grandfather bent down from his great height till his gaunt, strong face was on a level with Comstock's. "Well?"

"The secret," Comstock said, "is the exact opposite of what you claimed."

"Ahh?" The exclamation was almost jubilant.

"Yes," Comstock hurried on, fearing that if he didn't say it in a rush he never would get out the words, "You don't rule because you are afraid but because there is nothing that you fear."

"Come, come," The Grandfather smiled thinly, "each man, no matter how brave, has some secret fear. For instance fat people fear death."

The change of subject was so sudden that it threw Comstock off his mental stride. "Fat people?" he queried.

"Surely," The Grandfather said, "the thought must have occurred to you. Fat people are fat because they fear dying. Did you ever see a very thin person naked?"

To think, Comstock's veering

brain thought, that the day would ever come when he'd hear The Grandfather of all people use a dirty word like n...d!

"If you've ever seen a thin person nude, you can realize that their skeleton is omnipresent. This, to a fat person, is detestable. They want to hide their ever present *memento mori* decently. They don't want always to be reminded of that which is hidden inside of all of us, waiting for us . . . That's why they get fat. Padding. That's all it is, padding to hide the grisly skeleton who sits with us at every feast."

Struggling to get his attention on to this new vagary of The Grandfather, Comstock said, "But fat people die sooner than skinny ones."

"Certainly," The Grandfather nodded, "but what's that got to do with it? That's reality. The statistic that obesity shortens life is hard and true. But that reality only comes once, at the end of the line. To the fat person the important thing to hide from is the ever-present reminder that the day he is born he begins to die. That's the big trick they try to employ. To forget that fact. But I digress. You were saying?"

WHAT had he been saying? This maundering of the Grandfather, could it be that like the Elders, The Grandfather was senile? Comstock looked down at

his own beginning paunch and wondered if this was why the Grandfather had brought up the subject of fat, then he said, "I was saying that the reason you rule is because you have no fears."

"Yes. That was the subject under discussion, wasn't it?" Again The Grandfather stroked his beard. "Now then, just how did you arrive at that rather startling idea? Remember I don't agree with you, for as I said, every human being fears something."

"I am sure you are right," Comstock said tensely. "I am sure that every human being fears something . . . or someone."

"I find your remarks contradictory."

"Not at all," Comstock felt a little bolder. Crossing his arms, he dared the thunderbolts of The Grandfather's wrath. "I don't think you are a human being, grandpa."

The silence that followed his pronouncement seemed to last for all the years of Comstock's life.

When The Grandfather spoke, his words came as a withering shock to Comstock.

"You are a very brave man, Comstock. The bravest this world of ours has produced in five centuries . . ."

It was, after all, one thing to

have an hypothesis, it was an astrobat of a far different color to have that hypothesis substantiated. And right from the astrobat's mouth at that!

Looking down at his hands, Comstock was incuriously aware that they were trembling violently. He, brave? The idea was ludicrous. He was more badly scared than he had ever been in his whole life. Fear jumped and jolted through his body as he waited for The Grandfather to continue.

"But," The Grandfather said, "I can see that you are on the very brink of nervous exhaustion. I will speak to you more fully when you are fed and rested."

Comstock was too tired to do more than pick at the food that was provided for him in the bed-chamber to which an R.A. guided him. As a matter of fact, seated on the edge of the bed, his head whirling, he was barely aware of Pat's entrance. She had evidently been fed too, for her only concern was Comstock. Going to him, she forced him to lie down, then, as he closed his eyes blissfully at the feeling of ease that welled up in him, she gently spooned food into his mouth till his eyes closed completely.

She slept all that night right next to him, but so deep was his fatigue that it was not till the following night that he awoke

and by that time Pat had been up and about for hours. She came out of the bath in a swirl of soft cloth. Comstock felt excitement well up in him and knew instantly that he was almost all recovered from the slings and arrows that had assailed him.

Drawing her to him, he was very much aware of her presence this time.

WHEN they had finished making love she said, gently, "I almost forgot, and it's your fault," but her smile proved that she shared the fault if it could be called that, "The Grandfather wants to see you as soon as you rise."

Feeling prepared to tackle legions let alone The Grandfather, Comstock showered, shaved and dressed, whistling all the while. "Any chance of getting some food?" He had yelled through the pouring water so that when he finished dressing, a tray was all set up for him.

Wolfing down the food he listened intently to what Pat had learned during his sleep.

"And the most remarkable thing," Pat said, "is the artificial insemination laboratory downstairs!"

"Wait a minute," Comstock said through a mouthful of food, "what's a laboratory, what's insemination and what's artificial insemination?"

"Bowdler said that the funniest thing that happened when he was trying to make a rebel of you, was when you thought that the Fathers were really the fathers of all the children in the world."

"Wass so funny?" Comstock wanted to know, bread filling his mouth.

"Umm," Pat said. "I better backtrack a bit. As long as the scientists had a hand in running our world they were able to control the birth rate by mechanical means. But when they were killed, The Grandfather was left with the problem of trying to keep our world from being overpopulated without using any mechanics."

Comstock was completely confused but waited patiently, shovelling food into his empty belly while he waited for clarification.

"The first thing that occurred to The Grandfather was to try to control completely the sex drive but . . . that didn't work very well. Then he reasoned that if the sexual stereotype of women was changed to old women who could no longer bear children that he was then in a position to only have the proper number of women impregnated."

All the obscenity that Pat was mouthing would, a few days ago, have made Comstock faint, or aroused him, but it didn't even occur to him to find it odd.

She continued, "Then as soon as women who were past their menopause had become the love objects, The Grandfather set up a laboratory here in headquarters where the healthiest women in the population could come. Under hypnosis they were injected with live sperm, and lo and behold, the population curve was back under control again!"

Comstock was sure that what Pat was saying was important, but at the moment all he could really think about was his curious duel the night before with The Grandfather.

"With what little scientific gadgets were left after the last scientists were killed, The Grandfather set up a police force, which he called the Father's Right Arms, but not even the R.A.'s know how the radios they use, or the stun-guns, or the automobiles that they drive work, let alone knowing about the hypnosis that makes people see haloes around their heads.

"Between his control of the birth rate, his police force, and the little science at his command, he has kept our world running . . . after a fashion. But the point at which we rebels enter the picture is this."

It was a sure thing that what Pat was saying was vital to her, to him, and to the whole world, but Comstock could not help remembering the outrageous things

he had said, and thought about The Grandfather. What could it lead to? Why had the Grandfather called him the most courageous man . . .

Pat said, "But The Grandfather is only a man and therefore has made mistakes. He has frozen our culture at the same point for so long that humanity is in danger of drying up and dying out."

If, Comstock thought, The Grandfather had been only a man, then all this trouble would not have started, but there was no point in frightening Pat, she was too happy, too bubbling over with excitement, with the news of what a brave new world they were soon to have under the direction of Bowdler, Helen, Grundy, the philosopher, Pat and Comstock.

Comstock wondered vaguely what a philosopher was when Pat mentioned it, but that question too was made meaningless by the things he was worried about.

Leaning forward, Pat kissed Comstock, and said, "Isn't it wonderful, darling? I'm so excited I can hardly sit still." Then, remembering, she said, "But hurry up, sweetheart, you have to go see The Grandfather . . ."

"Yes. That was going to be his job.

He had been using it as a device when he had suggested that

the Picaroon beard The Grandfather in his lair. But now it was obvious, he, Comstock, was going to have to do precisely that!

CHAPTER 15

PAUSING at the door, Comstock turned around to blow a goodbye kiss to Pat. But she had turned with her back to him which may have been the reason that he at first failed to understand the meaning of what she said to him.

The words which baffled him were, "Darling, it's all going to be so worth while. It will mean that our child will be born in a world that is worth living in, not this sorry mess through which we have had to struggle."

One hand on the door knob, one foot raised, about to proceed out through the doorway, Comstock stood stock still. Then he said, and his voice was quite numb, "Child?"

Turning from the window, Pat smiled and said, "Oh, it's too soon to know, but one of the inevitable results of two people of opposite sexes making love is that a child is born, you know."

"Child?" he repeated.

"Imagine," Pat went on not noticing that her man looked as if he had been pole axed, "Our child will be the first love child born for centuries . . . Isn't that exciting?"

"Child?" he said for the third time and then fainted.

When he came to, Pat said, "I'm sorry, dear, perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned it all so abruptly."

"We're going to have a child. I'll be a father!" Beaming he took her in his arms and kissed her, for the first time the emotion he felt was a completely different kind of love, minus the lustful feelings that being near her generally engendered.

"That is," she said carefully, trying to avoid shocking him again, "we'll have a child if we are successful in what we have been doing."

"It's wonderful fun trying. isn't it?"

"Ummmm," she said, and kissed him with more fervor.

Neither knew how long an R.A. had been framed in the doorway, his shocked face alternately scarlet and then livid. The man croaked, "The Grandfather awaits your presence. Father Comstock."

Father with a capital F and father with a small f. Now, surely, Comstock thought, he would have the courage to face again the being whom he feared had to be overcome before their desire could come to fruition.

FACING The Grandfather was still difficult, Comstock found. Many things conspired to make

it so. First was his training, but second was the terrible ego position of being so much smaller than the towering figure, who stood, beard foaming down his chest, his hands behind his back as he paced back and forth in his sanctum and said, "Just before I feared your imminent collapse last night you said that you did not think I was a human being. Would you care to amplify your statement at this time?"

Rather than stand before The Grandfather, his head tilted back like a child facing an irate parent, Comstock decided to sit down. That way he could stare at The Grandfather's belt and speak to it, instead of getting a crick in his neck.

"Before I go back to that line of thought," Comstock said rather pompously. "I would like to take this opportunity of saying that in some ways I feel you have acted like an egregious idiot."

"Oh?"

"If I understand what I was told, you set up this whole strict very moral world just so that disease could be cured by what our people considered to be sins. Correct?"

"Correct."

"I think you've got the whole thing wrong."

"I see."

"Of course you've been around a lot longer than I have, but if I may say so, I think you got the

whole blasted thing turned around."

"You are being quite objectionable, Father Comstock."

"Objectionable, perhaps, but I notice that you do not say that I am incorrect in my assumption."

"I am waiting to see what your assumption may be."

"I think that disease is caused by sin."

"And you feel that this is different than saying that sin can cure disease?"

Was the old gent really an imbecile? Comstock wondered irritably. It seemed quite obvious to him that somewhere along the line the basic idea had been lost sight of, and the antithesis set up in its place.

"In one of the earth books I read there was a reference to what was called psychosomatic medicine. Now, if I understood what I read correctly, the theory of this kind of curing was that the person who was sick was punishing himself for some sin that he thought he had committed," Comstock said thoughtfully.

"Yes?"

"The cure then, was to assure the person that his sin was either non-existent or not heinous."

"I see."

"But the way you've run our world, you've made us commit real sins in order to be cured of non-existent diseases."

The Grandfather stared off into space. Then he snapped his fingers and said, "By golly, I bet you're right! Now that you say it out loud that does seem to be what the scientists were thinking about. Guess I got things a little mixed up."

"A little mixed up!" Comstock was incredulous. "You've had us living in a madhouse for five hundred years and all you can say is that you must have made a little mistake?"

Shrugging, The Grandfather said, "So I made a little mistake."

"Now," Comstock said, "now I know that my hypothesis is correct, how could you have listened to the things, the horrors that have gone on in our world for all these centuries and not been affected, not been chilled to the bone with a desire to do something concrete?"

The Grandfather seemed to consider the question carefully, then he shrugged and said, "Who listens?"

There was only one thing that remained for Comstock to do. Marshalling his forces, he suddenly leaped from his chair straight at The Grandfather.

His clutching hands were stretched out in front of him as the forward impetus of his movement carried him into The Grandfather's chest. He pulled at The Grandfather's beard.

Now he would know, once and for all.

And then he knew.

The beard came off in his hands.

CHAPTER 16

STUNNED by his own temerity, Comstock stared at what had formerly been hidden by the hair of the beard.

"I knew it," Comstock said at last. "I knew no human being could live for five hundred years."

"That is why I have taunted you into action," The Grandfather said gravely, "I knew that only when you saw with your own eyes the evidence of what you suspected would you be able to proceed properly."

"This is why there is no record of your existence prior to five hundred years ago?"

"Yes."

Staring at the metallic surface that had been hidden under the beard, seeing for the first time the control panel that covered The Grandfather's whole chest, Comstock wondered what to do next.

"I hope," The Grandfather said, "that I have not been derelict to my trust. But somehow the whole thing became too much for the mechanisms that the scientists built into me."

If scientists could do things



like this, Comstock thought with a wild surge of hope, if they could have built a thing like this that faced him, that was capable of living for half a thousand years, and had succeeded in behaving like a super-human being, then what other wonders was science capable of bringing about? What would the future hold, released from the dead hands that had held his world in sway for so long? The thought was enough to make his brain spin.

The beard lay across his hands, its very feel a challenge to the imagination for it was not made of hair but some substance unlike any that Comstock had ever seen before.

The Grandfather put his forefinger to a button on the board on his chest. It actuated a servo mechanism that allowed him to sit down. He said, "May I have my beard back?"

Witlessly, still astounded at what had come to pass, Comstock handed the object to the man? Thing? That sat across the desk from him.

When The Grandfather was in the act of replacing the beard, Comstock could see just under his chin, a series of rivets that held his head in place. One looked loose and Comstock pointed it out.

The Grandfather tightened the rivet and then sighed. "Yes, there can be no doubt I am be-

ginning to wear out. That is why I have forced this series of actions into being. That is why I forced Bowdler to leave the Board to search for you rebels. I knew that my day was coming to an end.

"I cannot say that I will be sorry to be able to go to rust peacefully."

The idea of The Grandfather rusting, so bizarre as to have been unimaginable a few days earlier did not even cause Comstock to flinch.

Forcing himself to listen to what The Grandfather was saying instead of wondering wildly about the future, he heard, "You see it was my primary function to keep the culture frozen till someone, anyone, with intelligence and guts, came along and saw past the façade that had been erected.

"I must confess," The Grandfather said wryly, "that when I first heard about you, I did not think *you* would be the one to tear down that façade."

Since Comstock was as amazed as the robot, he did not find the words insulting. As a matter of fact he was too worried about the next step that had to be taken to think much about what the old machine was saying.

"Shall we join my friends?" Comstock asked and it was only then that he realized how long he had been sitting thinking, for he

had not even heard The Grandfather ask for his help.

The machine was frozen in the same position it had assumed when it sat down at the desk. The Grandfather said almost plaintively. "I thought that perhaps you had become deaf."

"Huh?"

"One of my circuits is jammed. You'll have to help me. This has been happening more and more frequently lately, that's why I was so anxious for assistance."

"What can I do?"

"See if you can rotate the fourth dial on the left, on my chest."

But the dial moved with no result. There was no impulse being sent to motivate the big machine.

LUNATIC thoughts raced through Comstock's now addled brain. He wondered what vice The Grandfather would have to adopt in order to be cured.

"Don't get panicky," The Grandfather said. "It's only my body mechanism that has been affected. In my top desk drawer there is a pair of pliers. Get them."

Obedying, Comstock saw, in the desk drawer next to some tools, a metal memorandum pad. Scrawled on it he read the idea that had held back his world for five centuries. It said, "All or most diseases can be cured, if the very moral people of a very moral

civilization are forced to perform actions which they consider immoral." After this statement there were two more words. These, The Grandfather had evidently never considered objectively. The two words were, True? False?

But Comstock did not pause to think about the statement too much. Instead he grabbed the pliers and asked what he was to do with them.

"Unfasten the rivet that holds my head in place," the robot instructed.

Obedying the command was very difficult, Comstock found, for a variety of reasons. First, he had an ingrained feeling that what he was doing was the height of blasphemy, and then, when he controlled this conditioned reflex, he found that time and rust had almost frozen the rivets in place.

He was sweating by the time he had unfastened all the necklace of rivets.

The Grandfather said, "Now, very carefully, lift my head straight upwards."

There were many wires dangling down from the underside of the jaw. The Grandfather directed Comstock to cut them free.

Then and only then, with Comstock holding the head carefully between his blistered hands, The Grandfather said, "Now let us join the others."

IN the Board room, The Fathers, Bowdler, the philosopher, Grundy, Pat and Helen sat beneath an inscribed metal plaque which read:

"Alcoholism cures heart trouble."

"Adultery cures arteriosclerosis."

"Thieving cures insanity."

"Drug addiction cures cancer."

"Prostitution cures diabetes."

There were many such apothegms.

But no one even bothered to read them. As a matter of fact, Grundy had said that one of the first things that they had better do was remove the plaque. The others had agreed heartily.

A loudspeaker above the biggest door in the room said, "The Grandfather approaches."

The Fathers, in a body, forced their decrepit frames to rise.

The rebels decided that they too might as well rise out of respect.

It took a moment before everyone could see the object that Comstock was carrying under his arm.

Walking to the head of the table, Comstock said, "Sit down. Sit down. The Grandfather has a few words to say." Only then did he place the disembodied head he had been carrying onto the table in front of him.

Two of the oldest, sickest Fathers, died immediately.

When their bodies had been removed, Comstock said, "There's nothing to be afraid of. The Grandfather says that He is something that used to be called a robot."

Then rapping on the table with a gavel, he sat back and waited. Down at the far end of the table he could see Pat eyeing the head with awed fascination. The others were equally pop-eyed.

The philosopher, the man of words, could not be restrained. Before the Grandfather could speak, the philosopher asked incredulously, "Do you mean to say that we have been obeying the dictates of a machine?"

Nodding, Comstock said nonchalantly. "Yep."

Then The Grandfather spoke.

"I was made to be your servant, and it has been my sorry task to be your master. I have not enjoyed it and I must say that I am glad at long last to be rid of an onerous task."

Then he went on to describe the way he had tried, in his feeble, mechanical way to do that which he had been ordered to do. When he had finished his apologetic summary, he said, "But time grows ever shorter and I fear that even my carefully made cortex is beginning to go bad. Listen closely for I have no idea when I will cease to function.

"The mistakes I have made, have been errors of commission not omission. When I have failed it was because not even the scientists who made me could foretell what was to be, as no man can.

"I was told, just before the death of the scientist who finished me, that the reason all our people were driven from earth was because they were vestigial hangovers from what he called an inner-directed culture. An inner-directed culture is always the result of an historical period when the death rate is higher than the birth rate. This kind of culture possesses certain attributes which serve pioneers well, because these inner-directed people have a strong sense of right and wrong, they believe implicitly in black and white evils and virtues. But in our world the birth rate is now, because of my machinations, about equal to the death rate, our people live longer, few children are lost at birth, there is enough food to go around, and so it is time to evolve from an inner-directed culture to a more sophisticated one which has been called an other-directed culture.

"Such a culture is hesitant to make value judgments, it can no longer appraise the foibles of other human beings; the righteousness of the inner-directed person gives way to the more

adult approach that right and wrong are after all purely subjective concepts.

"These people can be more objective and since they can, they must inevitably be less prone to throw the first stone.

"There are many concomitants of such a culture, but to you will be the wonder and the glory of discovering them. This is your next step.

"Take it wisely."

IT was long before all that The Grandfather said made any sense to his hearers, but all of them remembered the words until the time came that they became understandable.

The last thing that The Grandfather said was, "In the old world from which we came, the earliest known culture was one called an ancestor-directed culture. This was understandable in a period when the death rate was so high and old age rare. Old age became magical since so few possessed it. Then as the elderliness alone ceased to be unique they ascended to the next culture pattern, the one I have described as the inner-directed culture. When your ancestors were sent away from earth almost all the earth people had become other-directed. What has happened in this long hiatus in which we've been out of touch with mother earth I cannot hazard an opinion.

"But if we are to proceed on the previous record we can be sure that they have now ascended to a still higher culture pattern. I would suggest that you not lift the force field that surrounds our planet till you have matured enough to be able to meet your earth cousins on an equal footing.

"An inner-directed culture places a terrific premium on fatherhood. That is why you have been raised with such a high opinion of fathers and why all your power symbols are in terms of fatherhood.

"In the next step which you are to take, fatherhood and motherhood will be equated properly and there will be no further emphasis on what has been called the battle of the sexes.

"The battle of the sexes will become not an armed truce, but an equal sharing of what is best in mankind.

"I have left directions as to how you may contact the interplanetary economy but I suggest you wait till the time is ripe before taking that step.

"And now I am about to go out of phase. At last . . . at long last . . . I thought it would never come . . ."

The eyes closed and the robot was still.

It never spoke again.

Pat ran to Comstock's side.

(continued on page 141)

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AM-61

The Exterminator

By A. HYATT VERRILL

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

THE short-short story has always been one of the most difficult forms to handle properly in the science fiction field—the major reason being that it does not permit enough wordage to build up an effective background and still carry a story. In other forms of fiction we accept everything but the story situation on faith. This is not possible in science fiction.

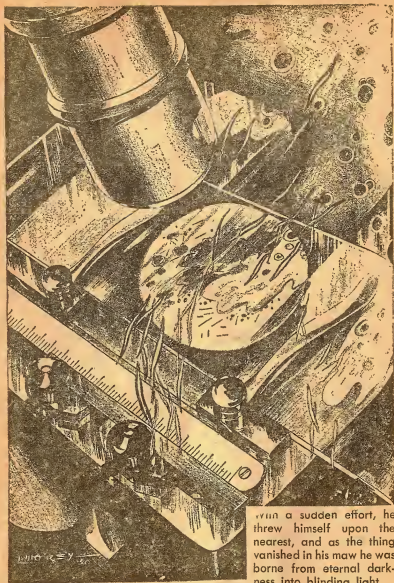
An internationally renowned archeologist and naturalist, A. Hyatt Verrill wrote dozens of books on his specialties. His re-

laxation was writing science fiction and virtually all of his stories of that nature appeared in AMAZING STORIES and AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY. Most of his efforts were of novelet and novel length and many oldtimers still affectionately recall Into the Green Prism, Beyond the Green Prism and The Bridge of Light. His attempt at the short-short came as a surprise to early readers of AMAZING STORIES, and proved one of the most popular tales of that length in the history of the magazine.

HE WAS a magnificent specimen of his kind. Translucent—white, swift in movement, possessing an almost uncanny faculty for discovering his prey, and invariably triumphing over his natural enemies. But his most outstanding feature was his insatiable appetite. He was as merciless and as indiscriminate a killer as a weasel or a ferret; but unlike those wanton

destroyers who kill for the mere lust of killing, the Exterminator never wasted his kill. Whatever he fell upon and destroyed was instantly devoured. To have watched him would have been fascinating. A rush, as he hurled himself upon his prey, a brief instant of immobility, of seeming hesitation, a slight tremor of his substance, and all was over; the unfortunate thing that had

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With a sudden effort, he threw himself upon the nearest, and as the thing vanished in his maw he was borne from eternal darkness into blinding light.

been moving, unsuspecting of danger, on its accustomed way had vanished completely, and the Exterminator was hurrying off, seeking avidly for another victim. He moved continually in an evenly flowing stream of liquid in absolute darkness. Hence eyes were non-essential, and he was guided entirely by instinct or by nature rather than by faculties such as we know.

He was not alone. Others of his kind were all about and the current was crowded with countless numbers of other organisms; slowly moving roundish things of reddish hue, wiggling tadpole-like creatures, star-shaped bodies; slender, attenuated things like sticks endowed with life; globular creatures; shapeless things constantly altering their form as they moved or rather swam; minute, almost invisible beings; thread-like, serpentine or eel-like organisms and countless other forms. Among all these, threading his way in the over-crowding warm current, the Exterminator moved aimlessly, yet ever with one all-consuming purpose—to kill and devour.

By some mysterious, inexplicable means he recognized friends and could unerringly distinguish foes. The reddish multitudes he avoided. He knew they were to remain unmolested and even when, as often happened, he

found himself surrounded, hemmed in, almost smothered by hordes of the harmless red things and was jostled by them, he remained unperturbed and made no attempt to injure or devour them. But the others—the writhing, thread-like creatures; the globular, avoid, angular, radiate and bar-like things; the rapidly wiggling tadpole-like organisms—were different. Among these he wrought rapid and terrible destruction. Yet even here he exhibited a strange discrimination. Some he passed by without offering to harm them, while others he attacked, slaughtered and devoured with indescribable ferocity. And on every hand others of his kind were doing the same. They were like a horde of ravenous sharks in a sea teeming with mackerel. They seemed obsessed with the one all-consuming desire to destroy, and so successful were they in this that often, for long periods, the ever moving stream in which they dwelt would be totally destitute of their prey.

Still, neither the Exterminator nor his fellows appeared to suffer for lack of sustenance. They were capable of going for long periods without food and they cruised, or rather swam slowly about, apparently as contented as when on a veritable orgy of killing. And even when the current bore no legitimate prey

within reach of the Exterminator and his companions, never did they attempt to injure or molest the ever present red forms nor the innumerable smaller organisms which they seemed to realize were friends. In fact, had it been possible to have interpreted their sensations, it would have been found that they were far more content, far more satisfied when there were no enemies to kill and devour than when the stream swarmed with their natural prey and there was a ceaseless ferocious urge to kill, kill, kill.

AT the latter times the stream in which the Exterminator dwelt became uncomfortably warm, which aroused him and his fellows to renewed activity for a space, but which brought death to many of the savage beings. And always, following these casualties, the hordes of enemies rapidly increased until the Exterminator found it almost impossible to decimate them. At times, too, the stream flowed slowly and weakly and a lethargy came over the Exterminator. Often at such times he floated rather than swam, his strength ebbed and his lust to kill almost vanished. But always there followed a change. The stream took on a peculiar bitter taste, countless numbers of Exterminator's foes died and

vanished while the Exterminator himself became endowed with unwonted sudden strength and fell ravenously upon the remaining enemies. At such times, also, the number of his fellows always increased in some mysterious manner as did the red beings. They seemed to appear from nowhere until the stream was thick with them.

Time did not exist for the Exterminator. He knew nothing of distance nor of night or day. He was susceptible only to changes of temperature in the stream where he always had dwelt, and to the absence or presence of his natural foes and natural allies. Though he was perhaps aware that the current followed an erratic course, that the stream flowed through seemingly endless tunnels that twisted and turned and branched off in innumerable directions and formed a labyrinth of smaller streams, he knew nothing of their routes, or their sources or limits, but swam, or rather drifted, anywhere and everywhere quite aimlessly. No doubt, somewhere within the hundreds of tunnels, there were others of his kind as large, as powerful and as insatiable a destroyer as himself. But as he was blind, as he did not possess the sense of hearing or other senses which enabled the higher forms of life to judge of their surroundings, he was

quite unaware of such companions near him. And, as it happened, he was the only one of his kind who survived the unwanted event that eventually occurred, and by so doing was worthy of being called the Exterminator.

For an unusually long period the current in the tunnel had been most uncomfortably warm. The stream had teemed with countless numbers of his foes and these, attacking the reddish forms, had decimated them. There had been a woeful decrease in the Exterminator's fellows also, and he and the few survivors had been forced to exert themselves to the utmost to avoid being overwhelmed. Even then the hordes of wiggling, gyrating, darting, weaving enemies seemed to increase faster than they were killed and devoured. It began to look as if their army would be victorious and the Exterminator and his fellows would be vanquished, utterly destroyed, when suddenly the slowly-flowing hot stream took on a strange, pungent, acrid taste. Instantly almost, the temperature decreased, the current increased and as if exposed to a gas attack, the swarming hosts of innumerable strange forms dwindled. And almost instantly the Exterminator's fellows appeared as if from nowhere and fell ravenously upon their surviving foes. In an

amazingly short time the avenging white creatures had practically exterminated their multitudinous enemies. Great numbers of the reddish organisms filled the stream and the Exterminator dashed hither and thither seeking chance survivors of his enemies. In eddies and the smaller tunnels he came upon a few. Almost instantly he dashed at them, destroyed them, swallowed them. Guided by some inexplicable power or force he swept along a tiny tunnel. Before him he was aware of a group of three tiny thread-like things, his deadliest foes—and hurled himself forward in chase. Overtaking one he was about to seize it when a terrific cataclysm occurred. The wall of the tunnel was split asunder, a great rent appeared, and with a rush like water through an opened sluice-way the enclosed stream poured upward through the opening.

Helpless in the grip of the current, the Exterminator was borne whirling, gyrating madly into the aperture. But his one obsession, in all-consuming desire to kill, overcame all terror, all other sensations. Even as the fluid hurled him onward he seized the wriggling foe so near him and swallowed it alive. At the same instant the remaining two were carried by the rushing current almost within his reach. With a sudden effort he threw

himself upon the nearest and as the thing vanished in his maw, he was borne from eternal darkness into blinding light.

Instantly the current ceased to flow. The liquid became stagnant and the countless red beings surrounding the Exterminator moved feebly, slowly, and gathered in clusters where they clung together as if for mutual support. Somewhere near at hand, the Exterminator sensed the presence of the last surviving member of the trio he had been chasing when the disaster took place. But in the stagnant, thick liquid, obstructed by the red beings, he could not move freely. He struggled, fought to reach this one remaining foe; but in vain. He felt suffocating, becoming weaker and weaker. And he was alone. Of all his comrades, he was the only one that had been carried through the rent in the tunnel that for so long had been his home.

Suddenly he felt himself lifted. Together with a few of the reddish things and a small portion of his native element, he was drawn up. Then with the others, he was dropped, and as he fell, new life coursed through him, for he realized that his hereditary enemy—that wiggling threadlike thing—was close beside him, that even yet he might fall upon and destroy it.

The next instant some heavy

object fell upon him. He was imprisoned there with his arch enemy, an infinitesimal distance from him, but hopelessly out of reach. A mad desire to wreak vengeance swept over him. He was losing strength rapidly. Already the red beings about him had become inert, motionless. Only he and that threadlike, tiny thing still showed signs of life. And the fluid was rapidly thickening. Suddenly, for a fraction of a second he felt free, and with a final spasmodic effort he moved, reached the enemy, and, triumphant at the last, became a motionless inert thing.

“STRANGE!” muttered a human voice as its owner peered through the microscope at the blood drop on the slide under the objective. “I could have sworn I caught a glimpse of a bacillus there a moment ago. But there’s not a trace of it now.”

“That new formula we injected had an almost miraculous effect,” observed a second voice.

“Yes,” agreed the first. “The crisis is past and the patient is out of danger. Not a single bacillus in this specimen. I would not have believed it possible.”

But neither physician was aware of the part the Exterminator had played. To them he was merely a white corpuscle lying dead in the rapidly drying blood drop on the glass-slide. **THE END**



THE SPECTROSCOPE

By S. E. COTTS

Reaching for the Stars. By Erik Bergaust. 407 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. \$4.95

The varied published reactions to this biography of rocketeer Wernher von Braun caused me to approach the task of reviewing it with reluctance. It did not seem possible that the book could be as bad as the negative comments indicated. Upon finishing it I found my optimism short lived. The book is bad from two standpoints—it is unsatisfactory as a biography, and it expresses views that I find extremely distasteful.

To consider the first point, this biography is a mixture of too many elements: personal material about von Braun; chunks of his ideas about ethics and education, etc. which appear to have been lifted verbatim from speeches he has delivered; a whole history of the development of rockets in Germany; a scathing indictment (seemingly more

the author's than von Braun's) of the U.S. government's efforts to take rocket research away from the Army and give it to the Air Force; and, as I anticipated, an endless harping on the tune that these men were "good" Germans and are now loyal and respected U.S. citizens. The narrative jumps around among these items, from the general to the particular and back again, drawn together by no real point of view except perhaps the irritation of the biographer's constant hero worship. Yet, in spite of his awe and respect for his subject, the book is very impersonal, giving no feeling that von Braun really sweated and lived through the scenes described. He has set down the outward facts but has not been able to imbue them with life so that von Braun remains a paper figure in the reading and not the dynamic force he is supposed to be. Also, in spite of the wide variety of

material used, the author has omitted one of the essentials of a biography, an index in the back. This assumes particular importance in a book such as this, where there are many names unfamiliar to the average reader.

Now to my second point, that the book expresses views that I find distasteful. It is an author's privilege to reveal his own views in a work, but in the present case this has been done to such a great degree that it never allows von Braun to speak for himself. Having finished the book, I believe I could write a truer, more accurate picture of the author, Bergaust, than of the subject, von Braun. As you can see, something is wrong somewhere. Von Braun and his team are in the U.S. to stay. It would be foolish to deny that they are serving this country well in their present role. But there remain certain questions this biography doesn't answer, in fact, it doesn't even pose the questions. It ignores them completely. If there were one hint, one word in the whole book to the effect that von Braun felt they should have fled when Einstein and others did, or that they felt Hitler was evil, or that it was just that Germany was defeated, or that they were in any way remorseful or sorry or even thought about these matters anymore—but no, there is nothing. Instead we are treated

to such gems as a quote of von Braun's, "Hitler may have been a bad man but he sure was not stupid." Also, we are told what "intelligent stock" all the German scientists come from. What a nauseous phrase, not to mention that it's unscientific! Again, we are told how the group had to wait five years as aliens in this country before they could begin taking out citizenship papers but how "they didn't complain at the delay." Complain? What should they have to complain about? Here they were plucked from the rubble of post-war Europe and brought to the U.S. to continue the work that meant so much to them that they were blind to its consequences (so they claimed) as a German weapon. This doesn't sound like "intelligent stock" to me though the author says they didn't realize Germany would use the V-2 as a weapon. But when they found out, I notice they didn't try to sabotage their own work (which would have been possible because so few people outside their own group really understood it or had faith in it). No, their work meant too much to them; they envisioned the great peaceful uses of rocketry that lay in store. Ah, what altruism! In the meantime, there are still D.P. camps in Europe filled with people who have already waited more than ten years for some

justice. But our government's immigration policy won't accept them—the brave and the dispossessed.

Another instance—the author makes a great point of telling us how von Braun's whole group voted unanimously to surrender to the Americans. But he spends very little time on their motives for this decision, or how they might have felt when they were making it. Of course, they would choose to surrender to the Americans, the only one of the Allies whose country had not felt Germany's wrath first hand, the only country rich enough to support the work for which they had sacrificed everything, perhaps even their own souls. They surrendered to the Americans for the most practical reasons and the air would be a little cleaner, at least, if someone would come out and say so, just as for the most practical of motives the U.S. brought them to this country. We here are not so simon-pure either.

I suppose there is nothing else to say at this point, for as I noted, they are here to stay, and if good can thrive from rotten seed we and our children will reap the benefits. But surely, we have done enough if we accept them and try to forgive them even if they acknowledge no wrong. Must we also glorify them? I think not.

Pilgrimage: The Book of The People. By Zenna Henderson. 239 pp. Doubleday & Company, Inc. \$3.50.

As one of Zenna Henderson's most ardent admirers, this book seems like manna from heaven to me. Just a short time ago in this column, I was bemoaning the fact that though she is frequently included in anthologies, no one had yet brought her stories together in a volume all her own. Doubleday deserves our heartfelt thanks for being the first to do so.

I must admit to a moment of doubt, however, when the time came to sit down and read the book. Would the stories be all that I and countless other readers remembered? Would a whole book of stories about *The People* be too much of a good thing? My fears were groundless. These stories wear well, and though it is impossible to predict the future, I would hazard a guess that this is an enduring volume, one that will be cherished in the years to come.

It is hardly possible that any s-f fan does not know about Zenna Henderson's *People* series. But for those who haven't been initiated yet, I'll do my best to explain. The *People* were coming from another planet when their spaceship crashed leaving those who survived to establish themselves on Earth as best they

could. This was no easy task, for although they didn't have a different physical appearance, they had abilities far beyond those of the people they found themselves among—abilities to fly, to heal, to read minds. The separate stories deal with their efforts to adjust to life on Earth, to find others who may have survived the crash, and to re-establish contact with The Home from which they came. Miss Henderson has endeavored to knit these stories into a continuous narrative. This is not wholly successful, but the stories have such strength that this flaw hardly detracts.

I have always felt that Miss

Henderson is one of the few writers to whom the phrase "sense of wonder" might be justly applied. Unfortunately, this beautiful and meaningful description has been used by thoughtless publishers and ad men so often and with such little understanding of what it really means that it has become the worst kind of cliché. But if you want to re-discover the true meaning of this epithet, read *Pilgrimage*, and explore again with the author the excitement of teaching, the pain that beauty brings, the balm of memory, and the infinite possibilities of a communication without any boundaries.

THE PLANET OF SHAME

(continued from page 130)

His waiting arms engulfed her as they stood, looking deeply into each other's eyes, savoring their moment of triumph, and thinking with delight of what the future held.

Comstock said, "I love you."

It was the first time in five hundred years that the air of that planet had heard those words said in a tone that meant by love—sharing and trust and hope and peace, and mutual sacrifice that something bigger and better might come from that love.

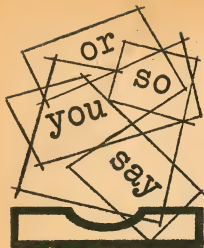
THE END

SF CALENDAR EVENTS

12th MIDWESTCON, June 23-25. North Plaza Motel, 7911 Reading Rd., Cincinnati 37, Ohio. No registration fee. Reservations should be made directly to the motel. For information write: Dan Ford, Box 19-T, RR #2, Laveland, Ohio.

BAYCON, 14th annual Westcon, July 1st and 2nd. Hotel Leamington, Oakland, Calif. Registration fee \$1. to June 1st, \$1.50 thereafter. Send advance fee to Miriam Carr, 1818 Hearst St., Berkeley, Calif.

19th WORLD SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION, September 2-4. Hyatt House, Seattle, Washington. Advance membership \$2, additional \$1 registration fee collected at the Convention. Send inquiries to: Seattle Science Fiction Club, Box 1365, Broadway Branch, Seattle 2, Wash.



Dear Editor:

I am from the younger generation of readers . . . young blood.

About the recent changes in the two mags . . . of course the changes, help. The better paper is probably a joy to collectors. The reprints certainly do no harm, they help the collectors and younger readers like me who would otherwise have to roam the back issue shops searching for a new addition to our beloved collections of sf. Like this we get new sf and something that makes every issue just a little bit better than it already is. But—a word about the titles of your two mags . . .

Kingsley Amis says . . . "Science fiction is every day losing some of its appropriateness as a

name for sf." Judith Merrill says "I share Mr. Amis's conclusions but for quite different reasons."

It has been adequately demonstrated that sf novels when sold to the public without the sf label were very popular . . . why? . . . anybody have an answer? These novels are of course . . . "No Blade of Grass," by John Ghristopher . . . "The Day of the Triffids," by John Wyndham and the recent . . . "Canticle for Leibowitz," by Walter M. Miller.

Heinlein calls sf "Speculative Fiction" which it is. When local Joe Public looks at his local newstand . . . he goes home with my impressions on his retina. Now you and I know what those titles mean but he doesn't.

I trust most readers of your two mags will agree that sf is speculation and a developing of known things to an imaginative but possible level. In other words sf writers invent. Why who invented space travel, time travel etc.? I don't mean in a physical sense but the idea. Of course many of these ideas have become reality. Also these ideas and things are expressed in the form of exciting fiction and stories.

And now I meekly and humbly would like to suggest a new name for one of your mags. Let's capitalize on Heinlein's label "Speculative Fiction," call your mag *Speculation*. . . . What I am

trying to say is . . . let's get rid of lurid titles that to outsiders and the public suggest cheap pulp mags no better than comics. Sf is good, maybe not all . . . but what form of literature is perfect? Readers of sf I ask you . . . have you any suggestions for better titles or does anyone disagree with me and the above mentioned people? Mags need intelligent titles to adequately fit the stories which are inside, many of which are good. It's a crime to name a good mag with such juvenile titles. I hope I don't sound too idealistic.

George Zebrowski
2895 Grand Concourse
Bronx 68, New York

• *A magazine's name is its identity, like a person's. It can take years to effect such a change properly. And it's hard to find a new name that's better than the old. Take "Speculation," for instance. What's it about? The stock market?*

Dear Editor:

Heartened by the appearance of a letter from my buddy John Foyster in the December '60 "Or So You Say," I'm now attempting to move Australia even deeper into the sf world. It's nice to see that this country is still well enough remembered to rate a mention in the US prozines—I thought you'd forgotten where we are.

. . . OR SO YOU SAY

It was a great disappointment to read your announcement of the new reprint feature, as I was hoping you'd devote some of the new space to a more modern and progressive department. Reprints are far from the best sf magazine filling. Like all literature, science fiction dates drastically in a short period, and it takes an especially fine author to produce material that will remain fresh and interesting more than a decade after its initial appearance. And let's face it—science fiction has so far failed to produce a writer who could even qualify as the poorest hack out in the cold hard world of "serious" literature. This is why "The Lost Machine" was so dull and dated, at least to my eyes. The writing was initially nothing very special, and Harris's ideas have been used and re-used over the years until they're nothing but threadbare cliches. No doubt, future reprints will be the same, and this department will gain no support from the fact that, up till a few months ago, *Amazing* was the poorest leading prozine ever published, as witness its absence from the better class anthologies.

Also—if I may appeal for a moment to the baser editorial instincts—fanzines can be a very handy source of material and writing talent, given a certain amount of encouragement. One

only has to look back over the fan magazine review column in *Startling* around 1940 to see how sf has benefited from the work of fans then. In one column for the month of February 1940, I counted no less than ten top-level scientific names mentioned in the review column, including Ray Bradbury, Bob Lowndes, Bob "Wilson" Tucker, Damon Knight, Christopher Youd (better known these days as "John Christopher"), John Carnell, editor of the British *New Worlds*, *SF Adventures* and *Science Fantasy*, Arthur C. Clarke and Eric Frank Russell. I don't doubt that many of these men got quite a kick from a prozine review, and perhaps thought more kindly of the demon editor for his mention, whether complimentary or otherwise. Maybe we owe the presence of Arthur Clarke and Ray Bradbury in the field now to the foresight of an editor back in those dim dark antiquarian ages before most of us (readers, that is) were born. So how about it, your worshipful highness? There are a lot of fans who no doubt want to write, but have no chance of ever seeing their work in print. Also, a lot of fans are eager to write loooong letters about sf, but have nobody to whom to write. And, least of all, there are any number of struggling young fanzine editors like John Foyster and myself

who would be immensely pleased with a mention in *Amazing*. If you don't care to put a fanzine review department in on my advice (which is rather unlikely), how about throwing the question open for comment by your readers?

John M. Baxter

Box 39, King St., P.O.

Sydney, N.S.W. Australia

● *The fanzine review question has always been open for comment, and we've had lots of it. Like any regular department—such as reprints, for example—there are always people who love 'em or hate 'em. Our feeling, as stated before, is that reprints give all our readers a chance to be in touch with sf's wellsprings. Fanzine reviews, we feel, interest too small a part of our audience.*

Dear Editor:

I agree with Virg Ames. Do not print serials. I am strongly against them, especially when I miss out on an issue. There are so many mags lying around the apartment with one or two installments of a serial missing it isn't funny. The next time one of your prozines has one I'm not going to buy. I have enough friends who agree with me that we'd pass around a petition if we thought it would do any good. Having once sold a lot of maga-

(continued on page 146)



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WRITE: Martin Lincoln, Amazing, 1 Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y. for information on how to place a classified ad in this section.

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WRITE: Martin Lincoln, Amazing, 1 Park Avenue, New York 16, N. Y. for information on how to place a classified ad in this section.

... OR SO YOU SAY

(continued from page 144)

zines myself, I'm giving it to you straight when I say that you would be surprised at the large number of people who avoid mags with serials. All this is a broad hint—please don't hesitate to take it.

With the April issue I'll read my first John Carter. From all I've heard about him it should be good. I'm skeptical but don't care at all if I find out that I'm wrong.

I know the majority of sf readers dislike serials. If they all write in about it there won't be any more. Speak up, people.

Sam Jason
Schenectady 3, N.Y.

● *Well, if everyone wants to argue about serials maybe we'll all learn something about public opinion. Warning: the best stories are long—too long to run complete in one issue. Suggestion: to avoid missing installments—subscribe!*

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● *The 35th Anniversary issue stirs a "remembrance of things past" in the minds of our veteran contributors. . . .*

Dear Cele:

I view the 35th Anniversary of *Amazing* with feelings of nostalgia, gratitude, and happiness. *Amazing* started me on the way to becoming a writer when I was 8 years old and saw my first issue—containing the "World of Giant Ants," by A. Hyatt Verrill.

Congratulations from one of your most grateful fans.

Ray Bradbury
Los Angeles, Calif.

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

The line-up of names in your 35th anniversary issue projects me back in memory to the "old days" before I "deserted" astrology for astro-fact. The cover and the entire issue look superb.

My repeated appreciation also for including one of my tales in this stellar company.

Otto "Eando" Binder
New York, N.Y.

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